



INTRODUCTION TO EYLF FACT SHEETS

This series of Good Practice Fact Sheets is designed to give educators ideas for promoting, exploring and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture whilst implementing the outcomes, principles and practices from the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The ideas and examples are designed to share and build upon the learnings and ideas from interviews that SNAICC conducted with 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education centres and six Indigenous Professional Support Units across Australia in early 2012. SNAICC hopes that the fact sheets will be valuable to all early childhood services – both those with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those without.

The Fact Sheets are not intended to provide a detailed ‘how to’ guide to implement the EYLF, but instead to prompt conversations and ideas on possible approaches. SNAICC hopes that these Good Practice Sheets will be evolving documents and we encourage services to share with us any examples that they think will add to these. SNAICC hopes to then update the factsheets with these new examples and release a new edition within the next 12 months.

A more detailed report summarising and drawing lessons from the consultations, *Learning from Good Practice: Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*, is also available on the SNAICC website.

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How will they work?

Here's what the different parts of each fact sheet mean.



Many thanks go out to the following organisations for their participation in these interviews and for providing the ideas, stories, examples and photos that form the content of the Fact Sheets.

Services

- Yappera Children's Service, Melbourne, Victoria
- Gudjahgahmiamia Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS), Wreck Bay, ACT Territory
- Gunai Lidj MACS, Morwell, Victoria
- Koonibba MACS, Koonibba, South Australia
- Minya Bunhii, Ceduna, South Australia
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA), Launceston, Tasmania
- Lulla's MACS, Shepparton, Victoria
- Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre, Thornlie, Western Australia
- Yawarra Child Care Centre, Mt Druitt, New South Wales
- Jalygurr-Guwan MACS, Broome, Western Australia
- Aboriginal Children's Centre, Risdon Cove, Tasmania
- Birrelee MACS, Tamworth, New South Wales
- Gundoo MACS, Cherbourg, Queensland
- Congress Child Care Centre (Ampe Kenhe Apmere), Alice Springs, Northern Territory

Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs)

- Yappera IPSU, Victoria
- IPSU, New South Wales & Australian Capital Territory
- QCOSS IPSU, Queensland
- Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit (ARMSU), IPSU, South Australia
- Yorganop, IPSU, Western Australia
- Remote & Regional Aboriginal Children & Services Support Unit (RRACSSU), IPSU, Northern Territory

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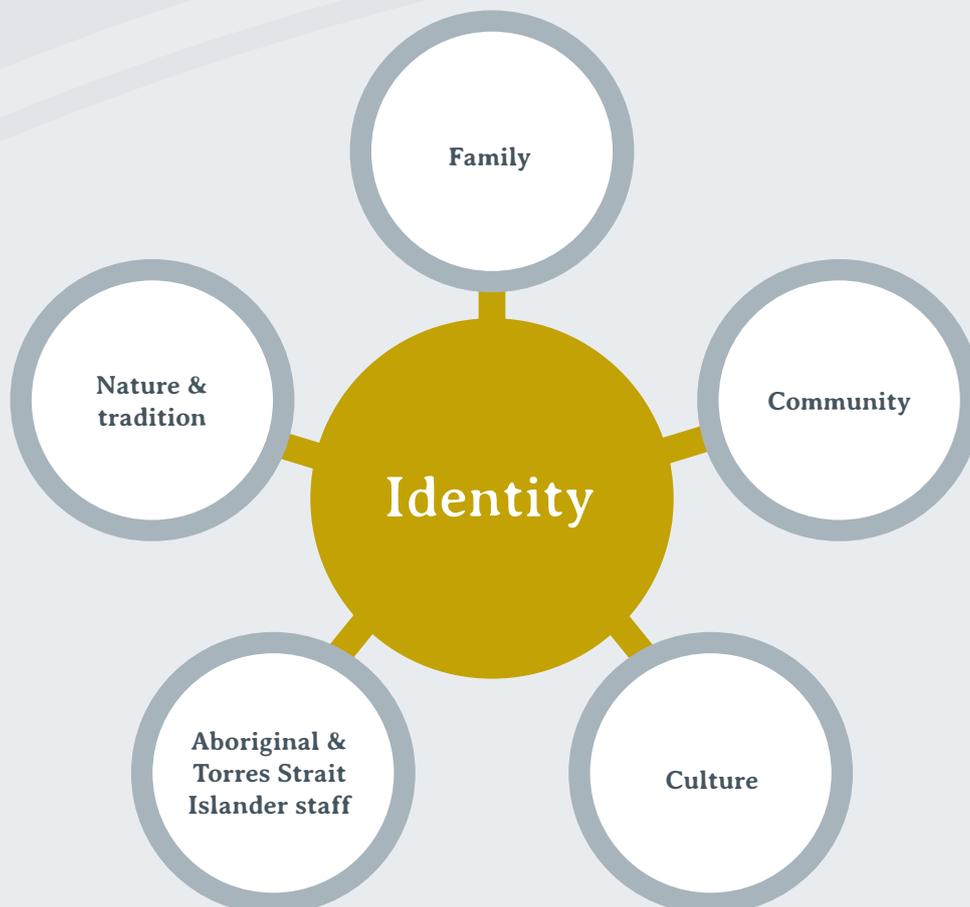
EYLF Outcome 1

CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Outcome 1: Children Have a Strong Sense of Identity**. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

By focusing on children's individual, family, community and cultural **identity** early childhood services help to build children's self-esteem and confidence. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the idea of **personal identity** is linked to **cultural identity**. Harnessing children's cultural identity helps to develop their sense of **being, belonging** and **becoming**.



Community pictures:

At the **Aboriginal Children's Centre** photo displays celebrate and reflect the community. The Director describes the photographs, "There's a whole board of Elders from over generations. There are pictures of Risdon Cove, Oyster Cove, children that used to come here, or political rallies done by the Aboriginal Children's Centre that got us here. So when people walk in here they all feel welcome, they all feel connected...it's speaking to the whole community."

Display photos and pictures of community members, community land and important historical community events at the service.

Reflecting community groups:

Lulla's MACS is in a community with two cultural groups, the Yorta Yorta and the Bangerang. Both are respected in the centre and educators talk to children about the cultures of the groups. The environment of the new centre reflects the culture and stories of both groups, with the outdoor space containing a play-sculpture of a platypus (a Bangerang animal) and a turtle (a Yorta Yorta animal) sandpit.

Build a relationship with your local aged care home to provide opportunities for children to visit and interact with local Elders.

Identity and community

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developing a strong **identity** includes developing a strong identity within your **community**. Family and community are valuable sources of cultural knowledge and skills, and inviting them into the centre can help children to feel a sense of **being** and **belonging** as part of a community.

Include information on all the groups from your local area through language, artwork, displays and discussion.

Invite community visitors and Elders to the service to share their skills or knowledge with the children – for example story telling or traditional music.

Building trust in the police:

Gunai Lidj was concerned that children's challenging experiences with the police was leading to negative associations. To counter this they initiated a program with the Koori Unit from the community policing squad in their area. Visitors from the Koori Unit now regularly join with the children in everyday activities at the service. This is helping the children to develop relationships of trust and positive experiences with the police. Whilst not culturally focused, the visits enhance culture by providing positive Aboriginal role models.

Celebrate NAIDOC week and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD).



Artwork at Lulla's MACS representing the Yorta Yorta Turtle

Fostering family identity for children in care:

At **Congress Child Care Centre** educators feel that it's particularly important to support children in protective care to develop a sense of identity within their family. Children in care often receive visits from their family members at the centre. The Director explains that during these visits she always takes a photo for the children, "so they have a really good picture of where they fit in their family. So this might be my biological family but this is the family I live with so they are all important to me...so we take lots of photos of that so that they can have this big connection, so my family isn't just mum and dad and two kids, it's mum and dad in this family and then I've got my mum and dad there and I've got aunts and uncles on all sorts of fronts."

Identity and family

Children feel a sense of identity when their families are honoured, celebrated and included at their service.

Create family trees with children for display at the service.

Take photos of children with their families to put up at the service.

Get to know each child's family and culture –where is their family from and what is their cultural group?



Children at the Aboriginal Children's Centre in Tasmania enjoy a visit from the Elders group

Encourage educators to share cultural skills and knowledge they may have with the children such as traditional painting, bush tucker, or local languages.

“If we didn’t have the Aboriginal staff here, we wouldn’t have the strong community links, or the understanding from the community of the children’s and families’ issues. And that’s why our service can respond so well and appropriately to different things that go on.” (Director, Birrelee MACS).

Cultural identity is just “a part of who we are (and) it’s just everyday practice for us.” (Director, Gundoo MACS).

Identity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and staff

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and staff help to make sure that the everyday programs and environment of the centre show and celebrate culture. They also provide advice for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in programming and talking to families and children.

Discuss strategies with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators for communicating with families, and promote positive awareness of cultural diversity for all children.



Cultural artwork at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre

Enriching and informing children’s learning experiences through culture:

Birrelee uses children’s culture to interest them in other areas. The service has worked with a local university to design numeracy and literacy resources that reflect the children’s cultures. The Director describes how this is a powerful way to engage with children on topics that they may not be interested in, “So the numeracy may not engage the child but that sense of connection and identity (in the resource) engages the child.” She emphasises “so definitely our learning experiences have to be culturally centred, and I think that’s why our kids struggle at school, because it becomes a secondary thing or an optional extra. Whereas here it’s our daily experience.”

Look around the centre and make sure that the centre’s environment says ‘if you’re Aboriginal you belong here’.

Share Dreaming Stories with children as a valuable, creative and fun way to talk about culture.

Use red, black and yellow, and green, blue and white colours in different displays, and through pictures, posters and material throughout the indoor and outdoor environments of your centre.

Mugadan and Jungaa:

To celebrate literacy day at **Gudjahgahmiamia MACS** this year one of the aunties from the community visited the service to tell the children the Dreamtime Story of the area, which is about Mugadan and Jungaa (the lizard and the octopus). To bring the story to life for the children she brought with her a collection of shells, an octopus and some picture cards.

Fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

Identity and culture

Incorporate culture on a daily, ongoing basis at all levels of the service

“I think we take for granted... how powerful that cultural connection is when it comes to learning, self-esteem, identity and belonging” (Director, **Birrelee MACS**).

Provide children with puzzles, games, puppets, books and music to share cultures from the local area and also from other parts of Australia.

Play and make traditional music – using clapsticks, didgeridoos and drums such as warups.

Embedding culture:

The Director from the **Aboriginal Children’s Centre**, the cook, and some of the educators were recently discussing how they could celebrate Easter at the centre whilst still incorporating culture, how to “give a message to our children about what’s important to our community at this time of year.” They decided that as it was also mutton bird season they would focus on this, and so they used natural grasses to make mutton bird nests with the children and to talk about Easter through this cultural lens. The Director describes how this approach didn’t detract from possible experiences at home on Easter, but brought in cultural practices and a celebration of a significant time for the community.

Include culturally representative educational resources such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dolls.

Have discussions with children around identity, land, history and what it means to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Put a cultural spin on everyday activities.

Supporting traditional sleeping practices:

At **Koonibba MACS** children are allowed to sleep together on mats on the floor, and can choose to sleep next to their relatives. Educators know that most of their children would not be comfortable sleeping in a cot as it is different to how they sleep at home.

Accommodate different children's sleeping arrangements – for example many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children prefer to sleep close to their relatives rather than their own cots.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices

Being aware of and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices helps children and families feel that they **belong**, and supports important cultural practices.

View children as independent, capable beings - give them freedom and independence and don't restrict their activities according to their age.

Create a family environment at your service – for example through family grouping time and supporting relatives to care for and teach each other.



Colourful paintings represent local culture at Minya Bunhii

Traditional shell work:

At **Gudjahgahmiamia MACS** a local community member has visited the centre to do shell work with the children. Shell work is an important part of the culture of Wrecks Bay. The children worked with Uncle Tom to create art out of the shells from the local area, and these pieces now displayed in the centre. A book was then created to show this experience through photos, and this is now on display on the children's bookshelf to remind them of what they did, and to share with parents and visitors.

Reflect the natural environment in the centre's play areas by including native plants from the local area.

Visit your local nature park to teach children about hunting, bush foods, stories and traditions.

Go on nature walks to collect bush tucker, bush materials and to build shelters.

Identity, nature and tradition

Connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to nature and traditional uses of the land helps them to develop a sense of identity and connection to the land.

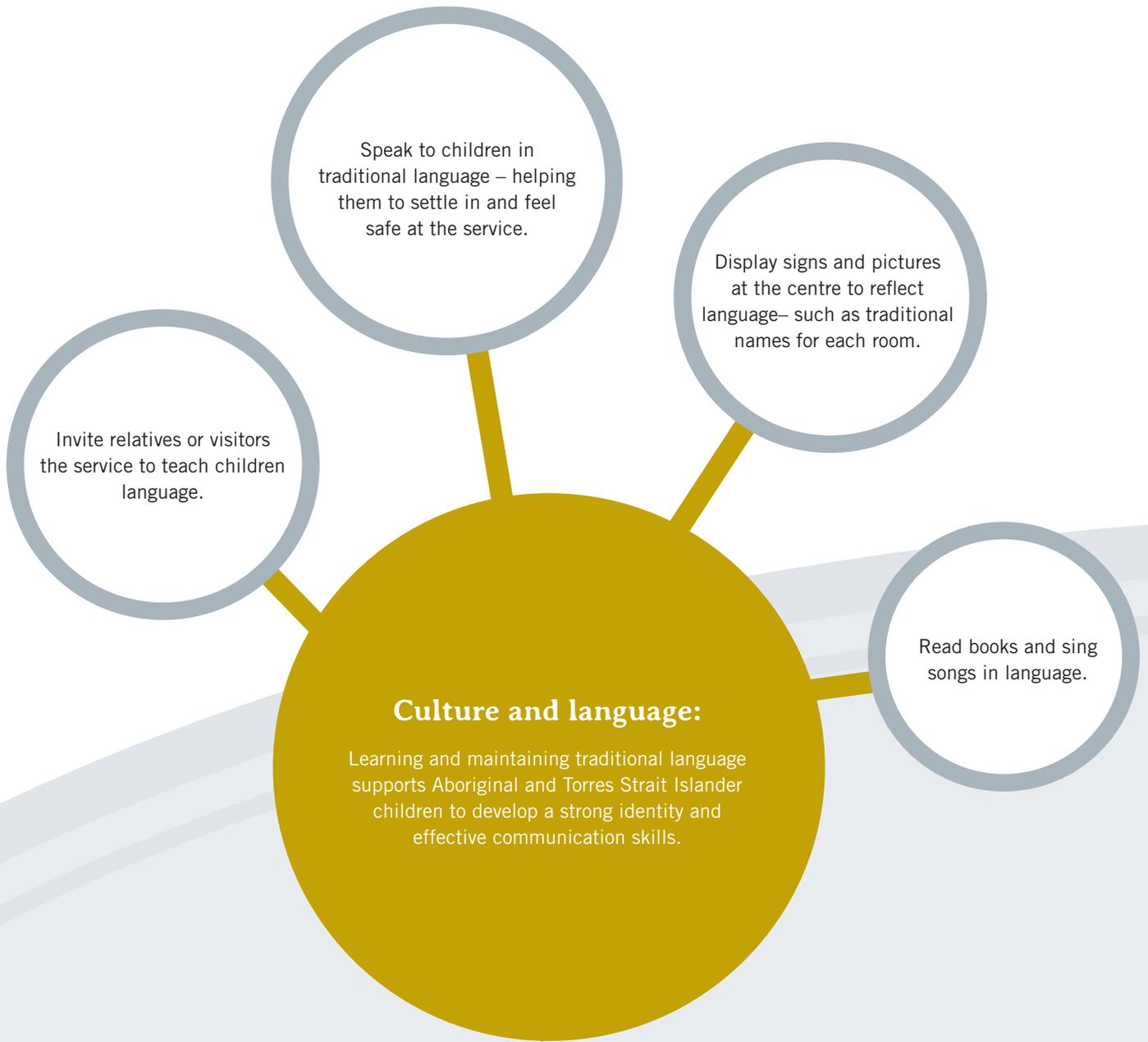
Create an area in your outdoor play space where children can cook traditional foods like kangaroo tails and have campfires.

Outdoor cultural space:

At **Minya Bunhii** a section of the outdoor play space provides an easily accessible cultural learning environment. Visitors often come to the centre to work with the children in this area to cook traditional food such as kangaroo tails and damper. The centre has also had local Aboriginal women visit to make cultural objects and musical instruments such as clapsticks, including using hot wire to burn patterns into the sticks.



Learning traditional kelp work at TACCA



Warups (drums) from the Torres Strait Islands

Home grown literacy:

Minya Bunhii has developed their own books to teach parents and children about the local Aboriginal culture and languages. This helps strengthen children’s identity, sense of belonging, and communication skills in English and in their local Aboriginal language. The books display photographs of Minya Bunhii children doing various activities and focus on different themes. These include sharing and caring, picking quandongs and making traditional crafts. The fourth book, “Minya Bunhii Kuliny Muka” (little Nest Babies) uses pictures of children aged from birth to toddlers demonstrating essential skills, and is written in both English and Kokatha (a local Aboriginal language).

EYLF Outcome 2

CHILDREN ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD

EYLF Principle 4:

RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Outcome 2: Children are Connected with and Contribute to Their World** and the **EYLF Principle 4: Respect for Diversity**. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Focusing on relationships with family, community and nature helps children to **be connected with and to contribute to their world**. An important part of this connection is that children show **respect for diversity**, which is also a key EYLF principle.



Studying the tides:

Jalygurr Guwan in Broome takes children to the coast to show the children the tides. These visits are led by a local educator who can share her knowledge of the tidal system and patterns with the children.

Building wiltjas:

Koonibba MACS educators take the children on weekly nature walks through the community. These walks help to connect children with their environment and ground them in their community and history. Activities such as building wiltjas (bush shelters) help them to explore the traditional practices of their ancestors and problem-solving as a group. Interaction with community members who come on the walks help them to develop strong links with their community and to see their local natural environment as communal land for which they all have a responsibility - for example taking bark only from the ground and not pulling it off trees.

Creating a vegetable or herb garden at the service can help children feel connected to the land and learn that if they care for the land it cares for them.

Use nature walks to teach children about the local plants of the area, what bush tucker foods are available at certain times of the year and to collect natural materials to use in arts and other activities back at the service.

Connection with nature – through gardens, outdoor play environments and nature walks

helps children to build a **strong connection to their world**, develop environmental responsibility, an awareness of the seasons and how to care for plants and bush tucker and feel that they **belong** to the land.

If there is no space or resources for a garden at the service connect with a local community garden to give children opportunities to learn about plants and gardening.

Arrange to take the children into the bush, to the coast, around the block or to the local park.

Use outdoor play environments to observe and talk about different seasonal cycles – such as autumn leaves and spring growth.

Have regular discussions with children about environmental responsibility, water conservation, paper usage and recycling.

A natural environment:

The **Aboriginal Children's Centre** has a purpose-built outdoor play environment designed from aerial photographs of the Furneaux Islands, a highly significant area for the Tasmanian Aboriginal population. Mounds in the playground replicate the mutton bird mounds of the islands, and a mutton bird shed sits in the play area. Inside the centre none of the windows are covered by blinds or curtains, so that the windows present an uninterrupted view of nature. The setting is key to connecting children to the land, as The Director explains, "We're connected to country every day. You walk in the building and the native hens are running at you, and the kids can hear the kookaburras, there's a little lake they can see out through the window...It's all bushland."

Giving children opportunities to work with nature is "about instilling in the children that they own this place. This is theirs... you use it and look after it, it's important enough to look after." (Aboriginal Children's Centre).

Hatching chickens:

Connecting in with the Easter celebrations, **Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre** recently hosted an incubator with live chicken eggs. This provided children with a unique learning opportunity to learn about the process of chickens hatching through discussions with educators, and then through viewing it happening within their own centre.

Invite a local wildlife group to bring native and non-native animals to the service (and teach the children the traditional names for the animals).

Connection with nature – through animals

Looking after animals teaches children important lessons like compassion, nurturing and responsibility, and connects them with the natural world.

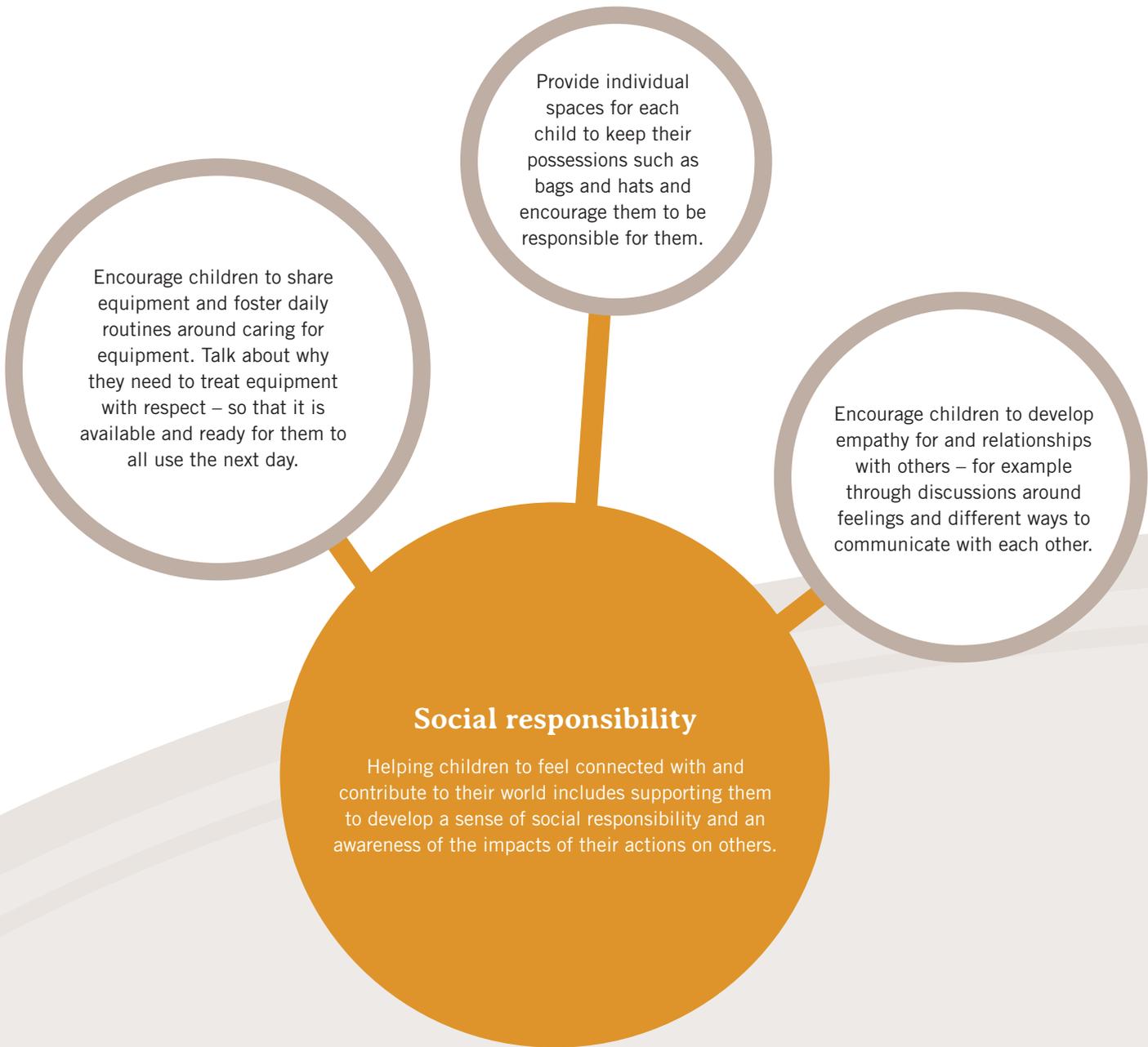
Have fish tanks for more permanent animals at the service and to help children learn about caring for pets.

Host an egg incubator and watch the chicks hatch.

Visit a wildlife park or zoo.



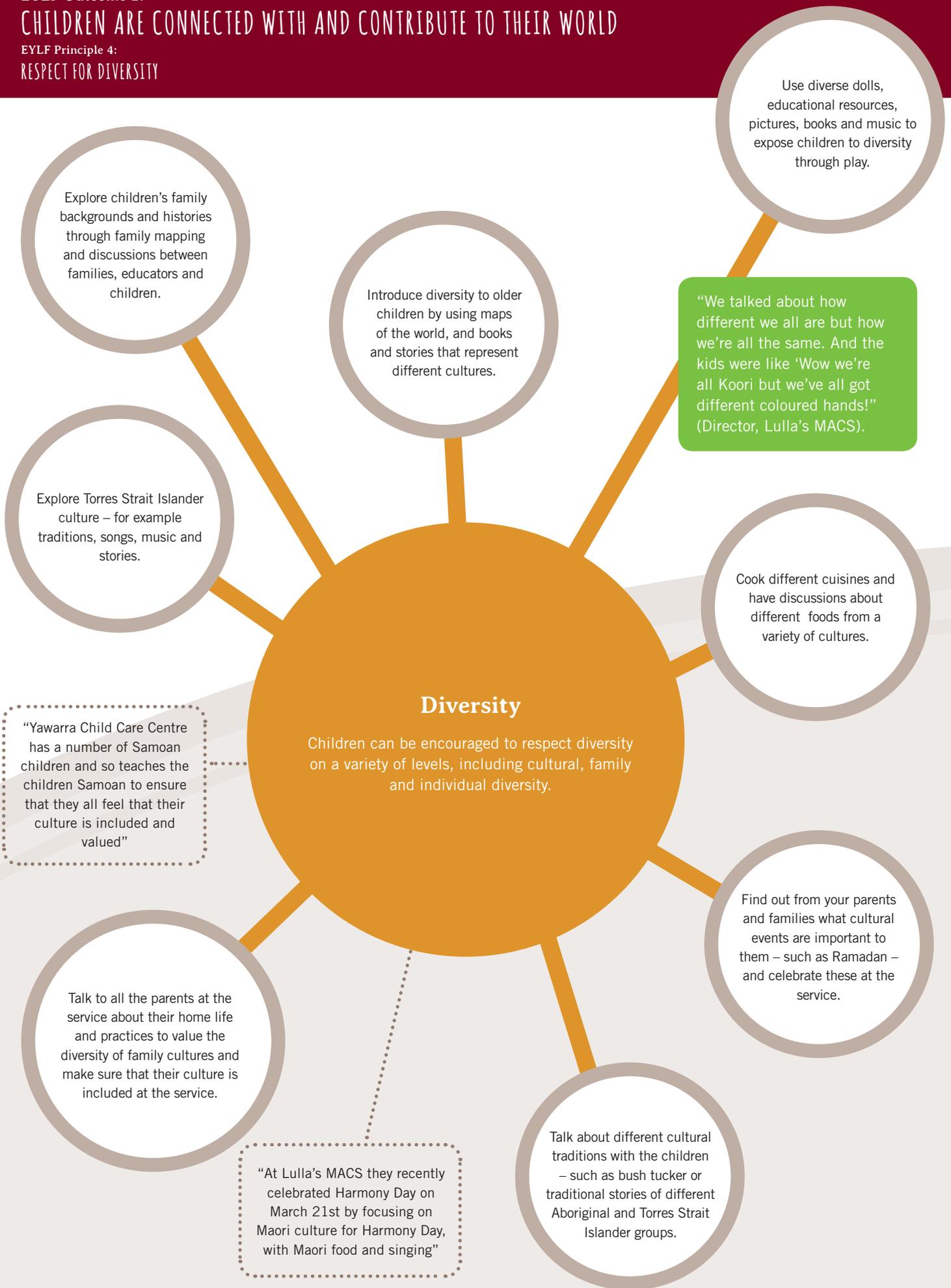
TACCA children enjoying the beach



Clean up crew at the Aboriginal Children's Centre



Children learning to take care of their garden, Aboriginal Children's Centre, Tasmania



EYLF Outcome 3:

CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING

EYLF Principle 1:

SECURE, RESPECTFUL AND RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

EYLF Practice 1:

HOLISTIC APPROACHES

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Outcome 3: Children Develop a Strong Sense of Wellbeing; Principle 1: Secure, Respectful and Reciprocal Relationships; and Practice 1: Holistic approaches** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Good practice approaches define the **wellbeing** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in broad terms as including children's social, emotional, creative, cultural, physical and cognitive/intellectual development. Important to children's social and emotional wellbeing is a key EYLF principle that their **relationships with educators and support staff are secure, respectful and reciprocal**. This approach also views children's wellbeing as being linked to the wellbeing of their family and community. A **holistic approach** to meeting children's wellbeing needs recognises the importance of a range of additional programs such as health, dental, nutritional and parenting programs and services.



“Working with our community anything can happen on any given day...a child may need one to one (attention), or a family may need assistance that takes half your day. Whether it be just support or whether it's making phone calls or supporting families in decisions they have to make, or whether it's working with other agencies to connect them to the families so they aren't approaching agencies cold face.” (Director, Birrelee MACS).

Ensuring a lower child to educator ratio can result in more individualised and comprehensive care to each child.

Healthy families:

Birrelee MACS provides a free wound clinic that is open to anyone in the community. By focusing on educating adults, Birrelee makes sure that children can also receive better health care. Birrelee MACS has also joined with Community Health to provide immunisation services to children and their families, including whooping cough.

Have educators available and prepared to assist families in accessing services they need, such as calling a service to make an appointment for them or talking through a decision that needs to be made about their child.

Holistic approaches to different needs

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children best develop when they are healthy, socially and emotionally secure, and when their families and communities are supported.

Regular 'hub' meetings between local early childhood services provide opportunities to talk about issues such as occupational therapy, speech therapy or children's developmental needs, and share ideas and knowledge.

Build partnerships with other organisations to link families up to other services, like health screenings and dental care. Partnerships with early intervention services such as Noah's Ark can help services to deliver parenting support and early intervention programs.

Who educators and support staff are is really important. Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and support staff is vital for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and understanding the local community and each child's family and home situation.

Health and dental open days:

To promote the importance of children’s oral health to parents, **Lulla’s MACS** opened up the centre to families during a recent dental visit day. This helped families and children understand the importance of dental hygiene and care – with the local newspaper even publishing an article! **Birrelee MACS** holds open day celebrations for health services and families to build these partnerships and to highlight the importance of health. One celebration included a visit by Super Cuz (a Koori superhero character) and an activity for children to show off their new health knowledge to their families.

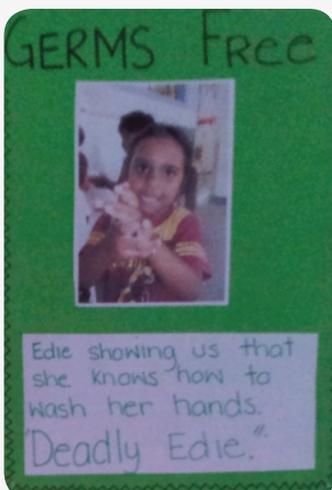
Health and dental services

include eye and ear checks; weight and height screening; maternal health services; dental care; occupational therapy; immunisations; speech pathology and advice and information to parents and families.

Provide a bus to take children and families to health appointments or link in with health providers to arrange for them to visit the centre directly.

Regularly talk with children and parents about aspects of good health such as hygiene, eating and sleeping well.

Use activities and posters around the service to encourage children to take responsibility for their own health through proper hand-washing, nose-blowing and hygiene habits.



A homemade poster encouraging hand-washing at Gundoo

Employ strategies to encourage children to develop sustainable, healthy eating habits, for example through educators and support staff sharing meals with children to role model healthy eating and talk to children about healthy food choices.

Form a partnership with another organisation to help deliver nutrition programs to your families and children – for example the South Australian Start Right Eat Right program, or draw on useful resources – like the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's *Tucker Talk Tips*.

Healthy food choices:

At **Jalygurr** children are helped to make choices about their own eating, with morning tea being spread over several hours so that they can learn to be aware of their own needs and to eat when they are hungry.

Nutrition

is a key part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's wellbeing, and is important both at services where children bring their lunch and where meals are provided on-site. Providing healthy meals is particularly important for children who might not receive their full nutritional requirements at home.

Engage with parents about children's nutrition – share information around children's food likes and dislikes, nutritious recipes and cooking on a budget.

Use a whiteboard or information board to showcase to families your daily or weekly menu and food tips. A section could also be used for parents to provide their recipe ideas and tips about food likes and dislikes.



Morning tea at TACCA

Supporting mums:

Gudjahgahmiamia runs a 'mums and bubs' program in partnership with Noah's Ark and the Learning 4 Life partnership to support the wellbeing of parents and children. Mums attending the program receive emotional and wellbeing support as well as useful information on supporting their child's behaviour. This helps to foster their social connections and their ability to respond positively to behavioural challenges. Sessions have included basic first aid, a 'pamper me, pamper by baby' program, and a 'learn to swim' program which ran for three weeks. The mothers met at the centre in the morning for a cup of tea or coffee, which helped to facilitate their social support networks. They then went to the pool with their children and Gudjahgahmiamia staff.

Supporting the emotional wellbeing, skills and knowledge of parents has huge benefits for children. Additional parenting programs include playgroups, sessions on first aid, positive parenting, child protection, budgeting, sexual health, learn to swim, cooking and nutrition and arts and crafts, or resource libraries that allow families to borrow parenting resources and toys.

Parental support

Children's wellbeing is linked to their parents' wellbeing, skills and knowledge: empowered, strong families best support healthy children. Knowing this, early childhood services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families recognise their role in supporting parents as well as children.

Link in with local organisations to collaboratively deliver these kinds of programs.

Playgroups are valuable opportunities for parents and children to interact in a supported and engaging atmosphere that helps to improve their social support networks.



Group meal time at the Aboriginal Children's Centre

Building on resilience:

Jalygurr's Coordinator explains that children at the service display high levels of resilience. She feels this is because most children are strongly connected to country, culture and family through regular activities with their families such as camping and fishing, "going out bush so they're learning about their country". Educators are able to build on this at Jalygurr by incorporating activities that support and reflect children's interests and cultural traditions, like visits to the beach and bush.

Utilise resources such as strengths cards for discussions with children about self-esteem and identity.

Reflect on the environment at the service and whether it sends out a message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that it is a secure, stable and nurturing space.

Social and emotional wellbeing

A strong cultural identity is central to enable children to be resilient, secure and confident adults. In building children's self-esteem and resilience, how services demonstrate the value and richness of culture is really important.

Incorporate family group time in the daily routine, for example at meal times, or at transition times to help children settle in and leave the service.

"If they can build their self-esteem in the first five years by the time they get to school they are ready for anything." (Director, Gundoo MACS).

Family grouping:

Congress implements a holistic approach to caring for children by using a family group structure within their service. This reflects the wishes of their families, as culturally a family group setting is better aligned with children's home and community environments and traditions. In consultations staff and families expressed that they were positive about the proposed change, and so educators then conducted research on the area and had training on the theory of attachment. Children are now free to roam throughout the centre, but all still have their own 'homeroom' and primary educator carer to provide them with security and attachment. Educators have found that children's behavioural issues have basically disappeared, which the Director thinks is because there is now reduced competition for toys between children of the same age in the same room. This has reduced educators' stress and noise levels. The Director also believes that it has made educators reflect more deeply on how to meet the needs of each individual child, rather than an age group.

Use family grouping approaches for all or part of a program to create a more natural, family style environment and to reflect traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices. This can support improved social and communication skills, cooperation and a sense of social responsibility within the children. Relatives are often able to settle or calm children who are upset, which helps to make the early childhood service feel safer for them, and to assist with continuity between their home and the service environments.

“One of the main things I tell the girls is that when our children come through the gates and into our centre we’re the ones who have to make a difference in those little people’s lives. And give them the best whilst they’re here at Gundoo, because... when they’re here it is up to us to make that difference in their lives.” (Director, **Gundoo MACS**).

Ensure that families have a key educator at drop off and pick up times to help settle the child.

Relationships with educators & support staff

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships between educators, support staff and children are a key aspect of care, with educators showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s interests, knowledge, capabilities, values and beliefs.

Design educator rostering arrangements that provide children with daily stability – so that they feel that attachments with educators who consistently look after and educate them are secure and dependable.



Relationships in action at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre

EYLF Outcome 4:

CHILDREN ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS

EYLF Principle 3:

HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND EQUITY

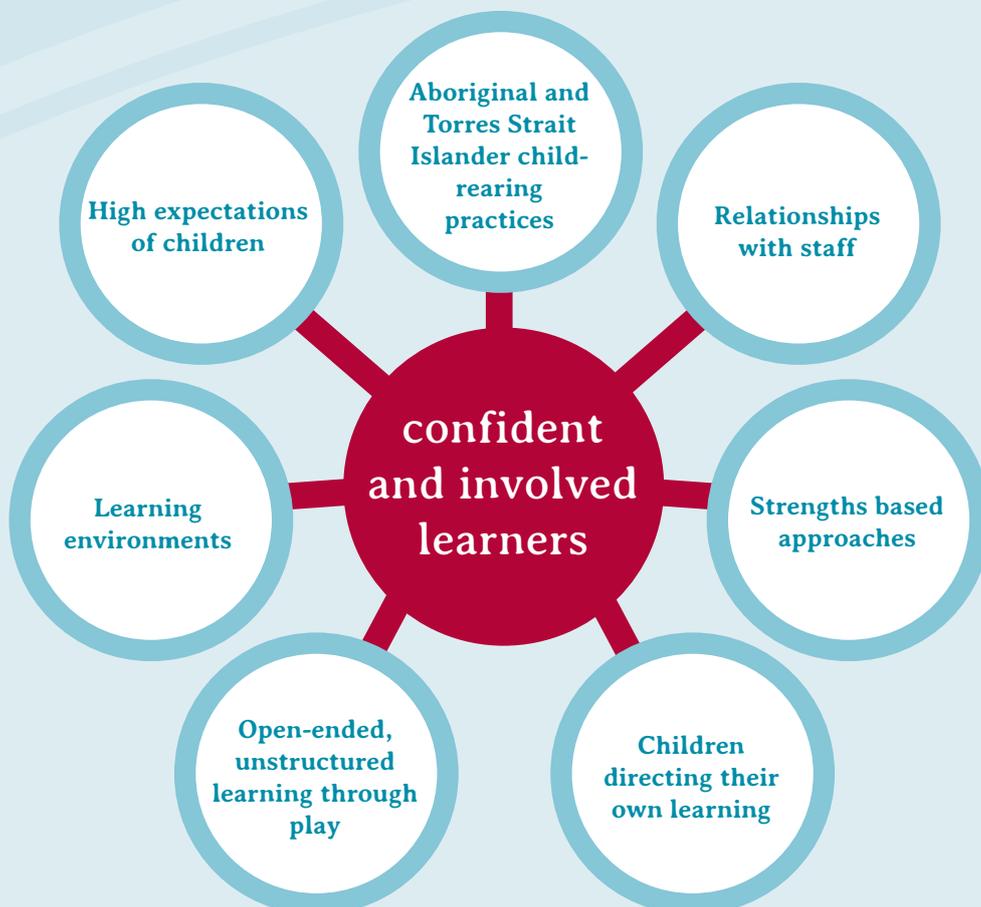
EYLF Practice 3:

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Outcome 4: Children Become Confident and Involved Learners**, and related EYLF principles and practices: **Principle 3: High Expectations and Equity** and **Practice 3: Learning Through Play** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

There are a variety of ways that services can support children to become **confident and involved learners**, in particular through educators having **high expectations** of children's capacities, and through **play-based approaches**.



“It’s that ongoing praise for children that gives them the confidence that they need. And that’s what we really promote when attracting staff working with Yappera, and the current staff working here - that children are all capable and competent learners.” (Director, Yappera MACS).

Encourage and praise children to help them cope with and overcome frustration when they can’t do something.

Key to supportive and stable relationships is trust. When children have trust in their educators they develop the confidence and motivation to extend themselves and to tackle new challenges and learning experiences.

Work one-on-one with individual children to give them the confidence to try something new.

Supportive and stable relationships with educators

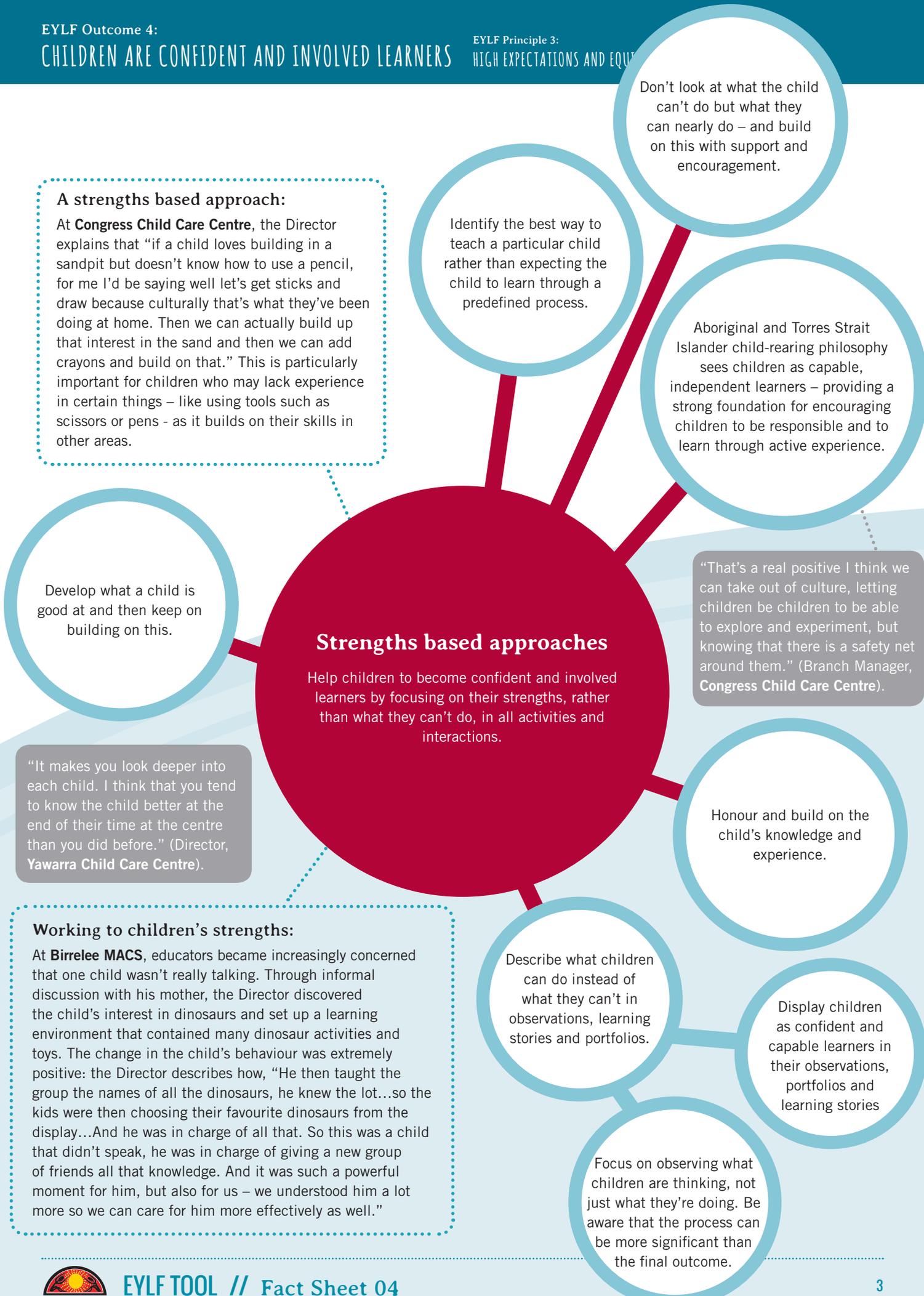
Help children to be confident in their learning, and provide a base from which children can tackle new challenges and learning experiences.

Encourage children to try new activities and experiences without pushing them into things they don’t want to do.

Encourage children’s resilience through discussions about ‘having a go’. See their ‘mistakes’ as learning experiences.



Supervised construction work using real tools at TACCA



Strengths based approaches

Help children to become confident and involved learners by focusing on their strengths, rather than what they can't do, in all activities and interactions.

Don't look at what the child can't do but what they can nearly do – and build on this with support and encouragement.

Identify the best way to teach a particular child rather than expecting the child to learn through a predefined process.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing philosophy sees children as capable, independent learners – providing a strong foundation for encouraging children to be responsible and to learn through active experience.

“That's a real positive I think we can take out of culture, letting children be children to be able to explore and experiment, but knowing that there is a safety net around them.” (Branch Manager, Congress Child Care Centre).

Honour and build on the child's knowledge and experience.

Describe what children can do instead of what they can't in observations, learning stories and portfolios.

Display children as confident and capable learners in their observations, portfolios and learning stories

Focus on observing what children are thinking, not just what they're doing. Be aware that the process can be more significant than the final outcome.

A strengths based approach:

At **Congress Child Care Centre**, the Director explains that “if a child loves building in a sandpit but doesn't know how to use a pencil, for me I'd be saying well let's get sticks and draw because culturally that's what they've been doing at home. Then we can actually build up that interest in the sand and then we can add crayons and build on that.” This is particularly important for children who may lack experience in certain things – like using tools such as scissors or pens - as it builds on their skills in other areas.

Develop what a child is good at and then keep on building on this.

“It makes you look deeper into each child. I think that you tend to know the child better at the end of their time at the centre than you did before.” (Director, Yawarra Child Care Centre).

Working to children's strengths:

At **Birreelee MACS**, educators became increasingly concerned that one child wasn't really talking. Through informal discussion with his mother, the Director discovered the child's interest in dinosaurs and set up a learning environment that contained many dinosaur activities and toys. The change in the child's behaviour was extremely positive: the Director describes how, “He then taught the group the names of all the dinosaurs, he knew the lot...so the kids were then choosing their favourite dinosaurs from the display...And he was in charge of all that. So this was a child that didn't speak, he was in charge of giving a new group of friends all that knowledge. And it was such a powerful moment for him, but also for us – we understood him a lot more so we can care for him more effectively as well.”

Designing activities through discussions:

Educators at **Gudjahgahmiamia** “ask open-ended questions to (children)...they give them that starting point, and children will just run with it”. Educators make sure that **all** children can join in these conversations and that their suggestions and knowledge are taken seriously. As the Director describes, children need to be supported to feel “that their opinion is valued, because they see it come to fruition.” This helps to children to view themselves as active contributors, because “it’s not just the one person that’s having the say all the time or the teacher being the leader, it’s up to them to make those decisions as well.”

Build activities from children’s interests, skills and knowledge. These can come out of yearning and unstructured conversations – for example about what they did on the weekend.

Engage children in exploring their world – for example encourage children to investigate what insects they might find in the garden or bush, and then follow this up with storytelling, art, investigation and play activities.

Demonstrate high expectations of children by scaffolding their learning using their existing knowledge and experiences.

Children directing their own learning
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are given opportunities to direct their own learning in order for them to become confident and involved learners.

Ask parents for photos of activities their child enjoys to provide ideas for activities to do with that child.

Engage with a specific, key interest a child might have, and encourage their interest through ongoing projects, excursions, discussions and activities.



Cooking at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre

Unstructured play:

At **Jalygurr Guwan** educators have created a collage table with arts and crafts materials that children can visit as and when they choose, to create whatever they like. Educators provide the materials, and ensure that the space is engaging and appealing to children, but then leave the children to create their own artwork by following their imagination and interests. Jalygurr Guwan’s Coordinator feels that this reflects that “staff aren’t really choosing what they want them to do, the children are choosing what they want to do and the staff are just there to guide them.”

Don’t underestimate children’s ability to learn through play!

Create unstructured, open-ended learning opportunities that encourage children to independently and confidently investigate, imaginatively design and direct their own play.

“I think that it’s actually developing the child’s overall sense of being, self-esteem, social skills, all that – just by playing.” (Director, **Gudjahgahmiamia MACS**).

Open-ended, unstructured learning through play

Play-based learning challenges children, helps them to be inquisitive and makes them want to explore. It’s also a key way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn. Learning through play is about giving children opportunities to make up their own games and challenges and work together to explore how to use a space and materials. This creates an environment where children, not adults, are directing the learning.

A natural environment:

Play-based learning creates the most natural environment in which children can develop. “Children need to learn and explore comfortably through play without being watched and pressurised. Otherwise they’re not going to learn” (Director, **Gunai Lidj**).

Whilst educators may have an idea of the structure of an activity, what children experience should be a flowing, self-directed and fun experience.



Imaginative play

Problem-solving and learning environments:

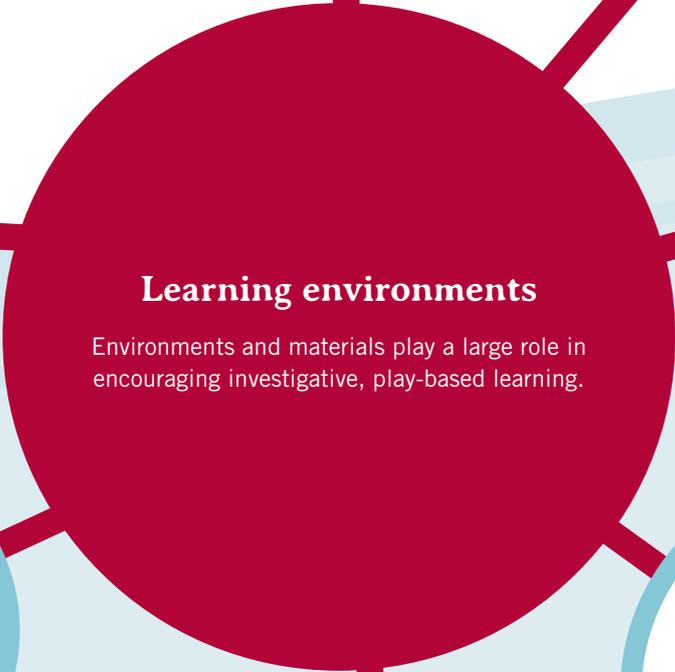
Educators at **TACCA** recently created an activity using toy car tracks and different surfaces to encourage children to explore different senses and textures and develop their spatial awareness. This included using different gradients and surfaces for the car 'tracks', for example ice trays to let the children explore slipperiness and sand to let them explore depth and texture. Educators then questioned children around issues such as "which one will float?" or "which one will be fastest?" and so forth to encourage their curiosity and experimentation skills.

Designing a learning environment that challenges children to be confident and involved learners is as much about deciding what **not** to put into an environment as what to put in.

Set up a learning environment that reflects the local natural environment and encourages children to explore different natural materials – for example local beach or bush habitats. This can also help children to feel connected to the land and their local culture.

Learning environments can encourage children to problem-solve – exploring what things are and how to use them.

Provide support to children without actually doing things for them – for example showing children how to use materials and tools, but not what to create with them.



An outdoor play space rich in natural, open-ended materials teaches children not just about the environment, but how to play and to be inquisitive learners

Natural resources encourage children to use their imagination to make each resource what they want it to be, for example painting on bark, 'fishing' with a stick or 'cooking' with gumnuts and seed pods. They also help children to learn about their local environment.

Set up a 'cultural space' as a learning environment within the service for children to explore and learn about their culture. This could include photos, artwork, materials and resources that reflect the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Investigating a bird's nest at TACCA



Presenting children’s capabilities:
At **Birrelee MACS** a photo diary of cooking sessions shows parents how capable their children are and encourages them to try cooking activities with their children at home.

“By coming here and feeling that this is a safe place, (children) can develop their potential and they might be able to better their lives ahead.” (Director, **Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre**).

Present children as strong, capable and confident learners in all communication with parents. Portfolios and other documents that parents view can be particularly helpful, as they focus on children’s strengths.

Positive interactions with children support them to have high expectations and confidence in themselves and what they can personally achieve.

Respect each child as an individual with unique capacities and knowledge.

High expectations of children
Support them to be confident and involved learners. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who may come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with self-esteem and confidence important to help them break out of intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Help children to learn about safe play – for example having a camp fire at the service to teach them about fire safety; climbing trees or stairs; or water play.

“We’re not going to say ‘no they can’t do it because they’re too young’. So we try to eliminate the word no out of everything. And so if it’s safe then certainly they will get the opportunity to do it.” (Director, **Gunai Lidj**).

“It’s about supervision, it’s about high expectations and about children being able to use things in the right way.” (Branch Manager, **Congress Child Care Centre**).

Involving every child:
At **Gunai Lidj** educators believe that activities should be offered to all children at the centre, and so for example when cooking activities are happening all children are involved – with even the youngest “being given a bowl to stir”. The Director points out that this helps to push children to try new things and to be confident in their learning.

Provide children with opportunities regardless of their age.

EYLF Outcome 5

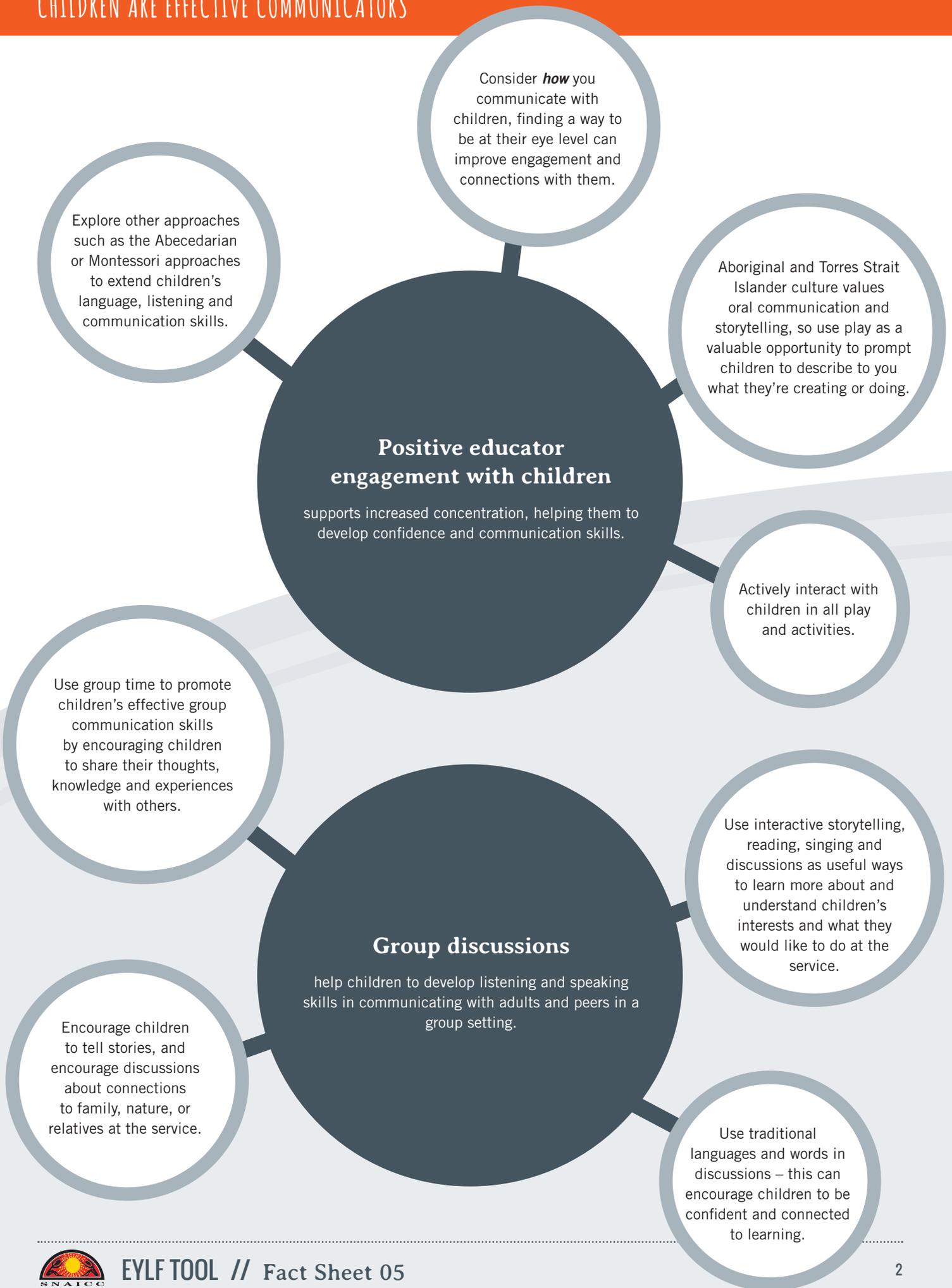
CHILDREN ARE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Outcome 5: Children are Effective Communicators**. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Effective communication encompasses many interactions, activities and learning experiences, and is critical to all EYLF outcomes, principles and practices.





Talking about feelings:

At **Yawarra Child Care Centre** educators regularly encourage children “to voice to other children how they’re thinking or feeling, so in telling them ‘don’t do that, I don’t like it’, trying to encourage them to express why they don’t like it, so it’s not always the staff intervening in things.” This helps children to learn how to articulate how they’re feeling, and also to understand how their actions impact on others.

Support children through positive interactions and guidance to become more effective communicators, for example through rephrasing or reflective listening to help them express their feelings.

Educators supporting children to interact with others

plays an important role in supporting children to learn positive strategies for (verbal and non-verbal) communication and engagement with others.

Offer learning environments that encourage small group play to facilitate communication.

Encourage positive communication between children, for example sharing and co-operative play.



Storytelling time at Lulla’s MACS

Literacy and families:

Yawarra Child Care Centre celebrates literacy through incorporating it into fun activities. They recently held a family fun day in conjunction with other local organisations to promote literacy development within the centre. A free family barbecue was held, and fun activities for the children. This helped to involve parents in the centre, and to support them to understand the value of literacy and their role in their child's development.

Reading books and storytelling

are valuable ways to help improve children's reading and language skills, amongst other things, as well as helping them to develop rich imaginations.

Make storytelling an interactive process where children are encouraged to engage with the story. Ask the children questions about the story, or have them imagine and create parts of it themselves.

Tell stories in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages – or invite a community member to do this. This helps children to be connected to their learning and is a fun way for children to learn or maintain traditional languages.

Form a partnership with a literacy organisation such as the *Let's Read* program run by the Smith Family.

Include families in your literacy programs – for example by holding a family fun day focusing on literacy.

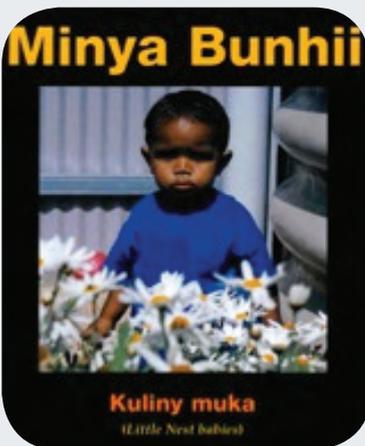
Create your own resources such as books and games to support their children's literacy and numeracy skills - resources that reflect the local context will be more meaningful for children (for more information on this read about Minya Bunhii's home-grown books in Fact Sheet 1, and see also SNAICC's *Aboriginal Children's Self Publishing Workshop – How To Kit*).

Use storytelling as an opportunity to explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander folklore and Dreamtime stories.

Use bilingual books to raise children's awareness of other languages.

Invite Elders into the centre to tell stories and talk about culture.

Use technology to support children's communication – for example through educators and children collaborating to use the internet to find out information, and then making books or resources to reflect what they've learnt.



One of the books created by Minya Bunhii: Kuliny Muka (Little Nest Babies)

EYLF Principle 2: PARTNERSHIPS

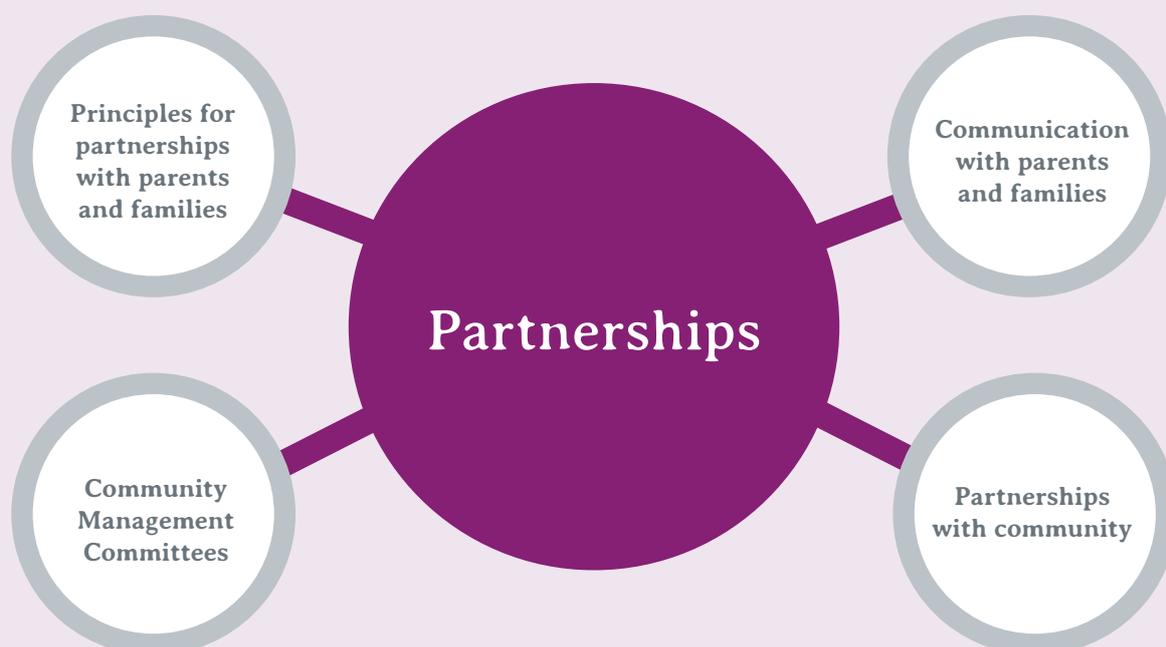
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide organisations and early childhood educators with some strategies to implement the **EYLF Principle 2: Partnerships** to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

This fact sheet focuses on good practice principles for partnerships with parents and families, and contains some ideas for action.

THE APPROACH

Children's learning and wellbeing outcomes are most likely to be achieved when services create, develop and sustain **partnerships** between families. Successful partnerships between early childhood educators and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families recognise that the concept of family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is broader than traditional interpretations based on the nuclear family structure.

A connection to and **partnership** with community also needs to be at the heart of any early childhood service that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This is because families and communities are both critical supports in providing early childhood care and development services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.



When educators live and work in a child's community "they often know why a child's behaviour has changed, or what's happening in a family's life." (Director, **Yappera Children's Service**).

The Director of the **Aboriginal Children's Centre** describes that their relationships with families are always built on trust, which is established over time by consistent educators and support staff. She describes how, "Those connections have been built over generations, and that's what makes this place special, it's the fact that somebody can drop their child off here and the same person who was running it when they were here is still here. At the moment there's three staff working here in different capacities that were children here. How do you document that? How do you say my community values me as a child, and now my community is valuing me as an adult?"

Educators and support staff who are related to families or have community connections can help parents to feel safe, welcome and comfortable in leaving their child at the centre, and also leads to more regular attendance. Local educators are also able to bring their knowledge of the child's family, culture and community into how they support them at the service.

Relationships built on trust mean that parents feel that the early childhood service is safe, non-judgmental, supportive and culturally appropriate. A service that understands Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is able to provide the flexibility that parents need, for example retaining a place at the service when children are absent for cultural or family reasons.

Educators understand that their role is broad and involves not only looking after the kids, but also having involvement with the child's family. Careful educator selection criteria, recruitment and training can ensure that educators understand the full breadth of their role.

Principles for partnerships with parents & families

Certain principles are vital to establish and sustain partnerships with parents and families.

Non-discrimination means that all families feel comfortable dropping by for a cuppa and a chat – through an 'open door' policy for example - and that community politics don't get in the way of families accessing the service.

Respect and equality in parent partnerships means that educators take active steps to treat all parents as equals and respect their knowledge and capacity as the child's first teachers.

Engaging on a strengths basis with parents means focusing on a child's strengths in educator-parent communication. In documentation focus on what a child is feeling and experiencing during an activity – as this is something parents are more likely to connect with and appreciate, and also gives them trust that educators care about a child and know what they are feeling.

"Our parents are a fantastic resource for us. (They) very easily communicate with us, let us know anything we need to know concerning their children, any concerns they might have about the service." (Director, **Gunai Lidj**).

Understanding and responding to parent's needs and current circumstances helps ensure accessibility to the service - including physical accessibility through bus transport and affordability through lower fees.

Birreele MACS's Director explains, "We understand that we have been trained and we're qualified in (early childhood education), that's why we have that knowledge. That doesn't make us the experts. So what we do is, as we're learning about things, we just share it with families." Part of respecting families choices and knowledge is then leaving them to decide whether they want to take on the information or not.

“We find some of our parents don’t read a lot of the information they take home, so we find a very good communication tool is to have a whole big wall full of photos, so a parent when they collect their child each day can go ‘oh, ok, this is what my child is doing in the kindergarten.’ ”
(Director, **Yappera Children’s Service**).

Family input:

TACCA includes a section in their programming plans for families to contribute ideas to centre programs. Families can bring in photos of their children engaged in different home activities. Educators first ask families who they feel will be more active in sharing, finding that this encourages participation of families less involved in the centre. One educator describes how seeing family’s photos displayed on the wall prompts others to think “they’re up on the wall, well we’ll bring in a photo from home, we’ll show what we did”.

Sharing with families:

Birreelee MACS makes sure that all resources they create can also be used by families to help them support their child’s development. Birreelee recently created a DVD to teach children lingo and have shared this with families. The Director explains “There’s no point in keeping lingo here and it not being taught anywhere else.” The resource is designed as a simple, encouraging and fun tool for families to share and learn together.

Educator-parent information sharing can happen through conversations or written formats or regular conversations – which particularly supports parents with low literacy levels. This builds strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families, and is particularly important for children who access the service via a bus service.

Daily diaries or communication books can include information about activities a child did, what they learned, and what they enjoyed doing – and both parents and educators can share this information.

Settling in: If a child is having trouble settling in educators can write a note for parents highlighting a positive experience their child had during the day to help reassure them and give them something to focus on with their child.

Communication with parents and families

Open days or evenings are valuable opportunities to invite families in to share children’s work and achievements, provide information, and to celebrate particular events such as literacy days, health visits, or days for particular family members, such as fathers, mothers and grandmothers. They are also useful to link up families with other services – such as health and dental.

The Parent Partnership

is an innovative approach **Gudjahgahmiamia** uses to gather information from parents – which helps Educators better focus on achieving the EYLF outcomes for each child. Parents and staff both complete information sheets that ask them to comment on how they think the child is developing under different EYLF components. This has helped parents to appreciate the role of the educators, “It’s like a validation for them - we know what we’re doing. We’re not just baby-sitting, we’re educating their children.”

Information nights:

Yappera Children’s Service holds regular information nights for parents and families. Verbal and visual presentations as well as handouts provide information on different child care theories and theorists, the early childhood frameworks, program design and activities, educational outcomes and the importance of the early years in a child’s development.

Parent input provides in-depth information on children’s strengths and interests, their family and home life, and any particular health or additional needs to inform weekly programming ideas, enhance continuity for children between home and the service and help educators understand each individual child better.

Community outreach – for example through NAIDOC week and National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day (NAICD) – is a valuable way of building partnerships with families, communities and increasing the profile of the service.

“What makes (Gundoo) unique is (that) it is a community centre, run by community people. I think we all work well together. We support each other and we try and go that one step further to make a difference in our community as well as for our little children. It is that...community base and community connection.”
(Director, **Gundoo Macs**).

Partnerships with community

Services play an important role in the development of their local community. Building a stronger community helps develop families who can better support children’s development, and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s identity and connection.

“I don’t think we’ve ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community.” (Director, **Aboriginal Children’s Centre**).

Community visitors to the service can share particular skills and knowledge with children, such as arts, music, dancing, cooking, story-telling, traditional language or other aspects of culture.

Mobile outreach service:

At **Jalygurr Guwan** partnerships with the community are fostered through a mobile outreach service run in partnership with the Department for Communities. The service reaches about ten children and families a week who wouldn’t normally access mainstream services, and meets on a local oval. It provides free activities for babies up to five years of age, and also helps link parents in with local health services.



Family time, Horn Island



EYLF Practice 2:

RESPONSIVENESS TO CHILDREN

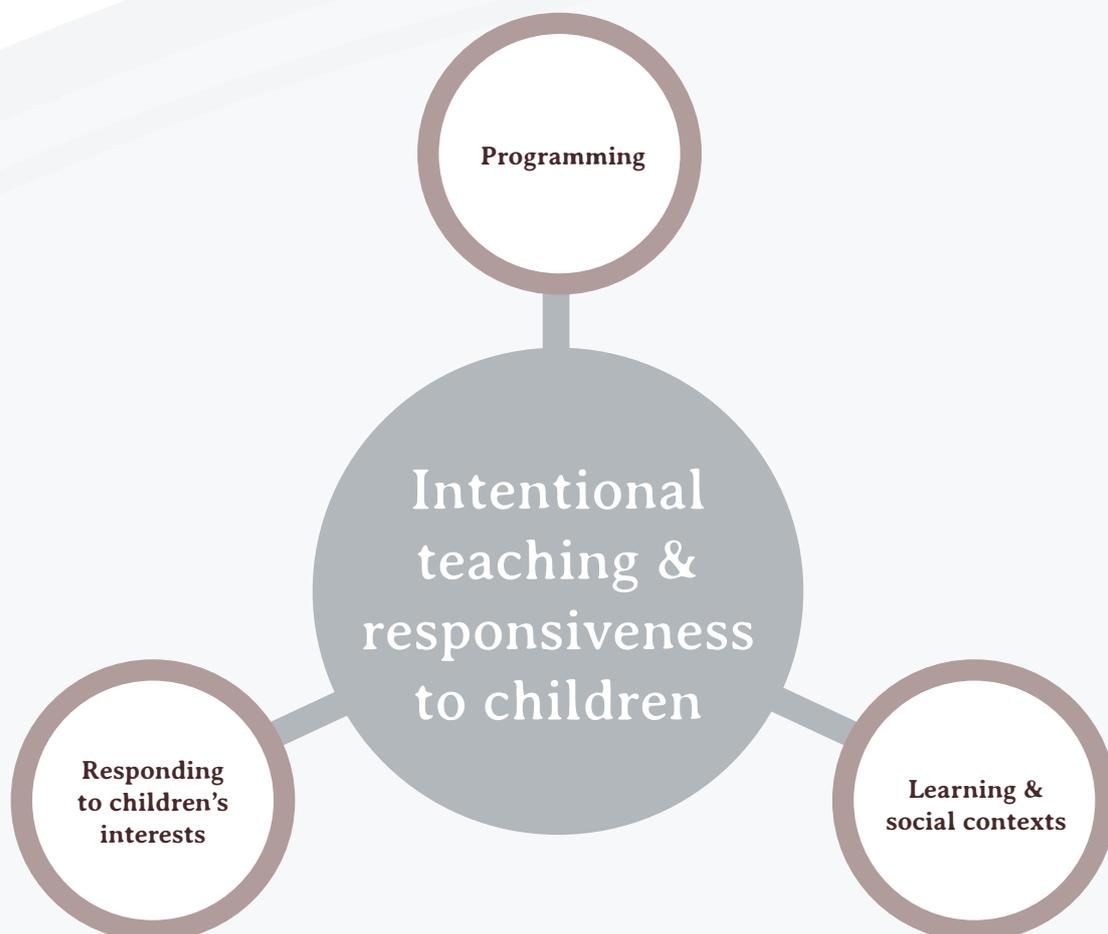
EYLF Practice 4:

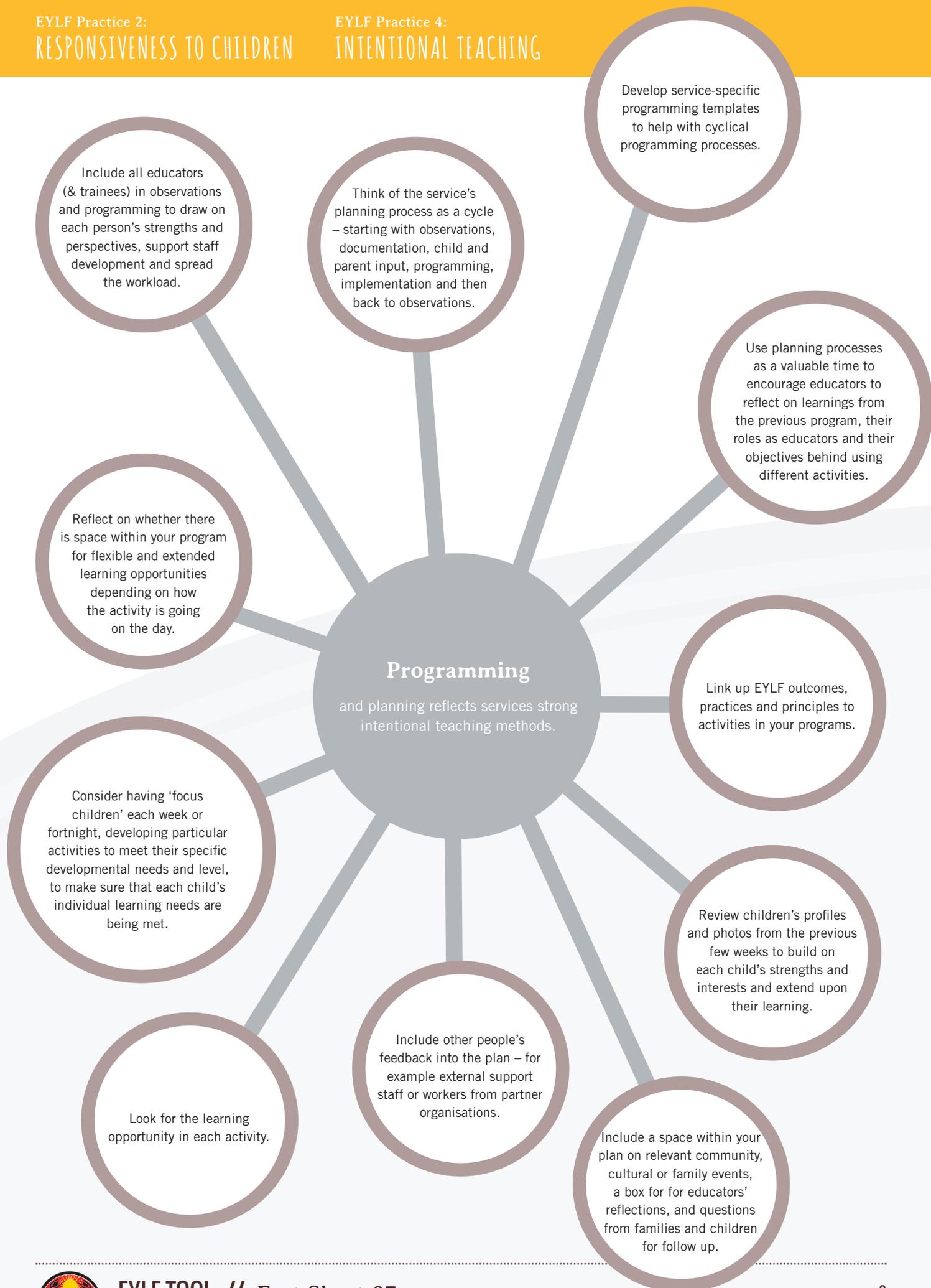
INTENTIONAL TEACHING

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Practice 2: Responsiveness to Children** and **Practice 4: Intentional Teaching** in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

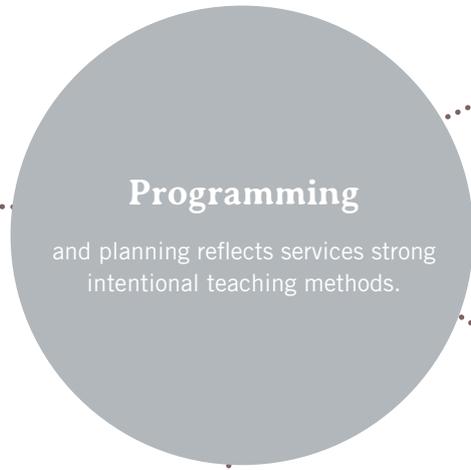
An **intentional teaching** approach requires educators to develop programs and learning experiences that are purposeful and **respond to children's** needs, strengths and interests.





Programming webs:

Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre's Director describes their programs as child-based and as representing 'webs' of themes rather than boxes of activities. Educators start with a central theme or material, such as 'dinosaurs' or 'playdough' through which they want to teach specific things, and then from this build a web of different experiences and activities for the children. This is however still flexible to allow for spontaneous learning and child directed experiences. The Director explained a basic plan that might, for example, include play based in the garden, where the children could discover a butterfly or a snail which leads on to a different tangent based on this experience. Responding to the children's expressed interests, the educator might then find books or different resources on snails or butterflies, or the children might choose to construct these creatures out of dough. As the Director highlights, "it just flows on from what the children are interested in... (there's) a bit more involvement from the kids – you don't just sit down and the teacher decides what we're doing." She feels that this responsiveness to children increases participation, "when it's something they're interested in, they become a bit more involved and concentrated because it's something they want to know."



Holistic programming:

The **Aboriginal Children's Centre** views their program as a holistic plan for children's care and development. All aspects of care are factored into their program, including routines around meals and hygiene, as this is all part of "what messages we want to give the children about healthy eating practices, outdoor play, good physical activity." (Director).

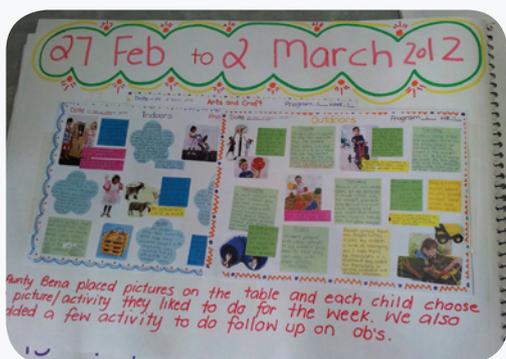
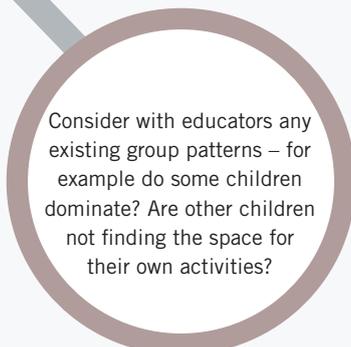
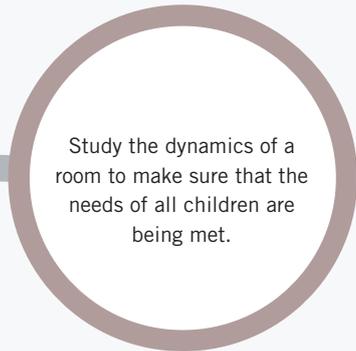
"Having a really clear idea of where you want your program to go and what learning you want to happen, you can see the change in kids on the floor." (Educator, **TACCA**).

The emergent curriculum:

Educators at **Yawarra Child Care Centre** demonstrate intentional teaching and responsiveness to children by building their learning program around children's interests and strengths whilst still incorporating "teacher led experiences and ideas, and things that we think they need to learn about." Programming reflects emergent curriculum principles and is now more about post-programming. This involves taking into account what has worked with previous activities in designing new plans, and then setting up a learning environment to facilitate this. Educators allow the children's interests and abilities to direct the flow of activities. At the end of the day educators reflect on the activities and then record the program.

Room dynamics:

At **Gunai Lidj** educators recently needed to make some adjustments to ensure that a more dominant child wasn't disrupting the other children. They first reflected on his interests, and then put in place a strategy to ensure that he could be occupied as soon as he came into the room to help to minimise disruption to other children. The Director describes that this is working very successfully, but that being responsive may require being flexible in putting in place new strategies as needed.



The weekly program at Gundoo MACS

A construction focus:

At **TACCA** one child's interest in building activities prompted a recent monthly program focus on 'construction'. Educators then realised that this was something quite a few children were interested in – for example other children recalled activities at home where they helped parents with painting rooms, building a dolls house and renovating a kitchen. Educators arranged an excursion to a local hardware store, and set up activities focusing on building, constructing and deconstructing things, bringing real building materials such as timber and recycled materials into the centre. They sung songs about building to encourage children's communication, and had discussions about different building roles in the community such as road workers or designers. They also planned for a community member to visit the centre to talk about construction.

"You tend to find the things that they're not very good at get focused on within (their) strengths...you don't need sit down and teach them this is red, this is blue, it will come once they're participating in things that they're interested in and they want to spend time on." (Director, **Yawarra Child Care Centre**).

Embracing children's interests:

At **Birreelee MACS**, educators understand that football is a huge community passion – and something children are very interested in. The centre Director describes this as "understanding the cultures within our culture." They utilise and embrace this in how they engage with children. For example, one child is very keen on football and already a good player. The Director explains that whilst he is talented at football, "we can't get him to concentrate on other things. So we use the football – we made up this makeshift goal and we had to count how many times he could get it in. So we got 'one, two, three, four – hang on there's a four on my dice, let's find it. Ok let's do it again. This time there's a 6 on my dice, let's find it'. So you just take those opportunities and you value them."

Observe what children are thinking and feeling, as well as what they're doing.

Build children's interests and strengths into the planning stage – share the curriculum-making with children.

Responding to children's interests

In programming draws on a strengths based approach and understanding that children learn best when they are interested and engaged in an activity.

Seek parents input into the program –through informal discussions or more structured methods to ensure their feedback is recorded. For example, you could ask parents to bring in photos of different activities that they do at home with their children.

Celebrating the coast:

At the coastal based service of **Gudjahgahmiamia** fishing is a popular activity in the community and with the children. Drawing on this, educators recently planned for art activities to create fish, and then hung them up in a fishing net displayed in one of the rooms. An excursion to the beach gave children the chance to gather shells and other sea materials. Educators focused on stories and pictures that related to the sea, which provided a starting point for children and educators to share personal stories. A fish tank has been added to the room so that children can now observe and learn to care for fish.

Reflect on how you build activities on children's interests during the program cycle. For example, educators can hold discussions with children during and after an activity, and can then build on this through further activities such as excursions, art, play dough, construction, singing or music, group discussions, reading and story-telling, and visitors to the service.



Exploring painting

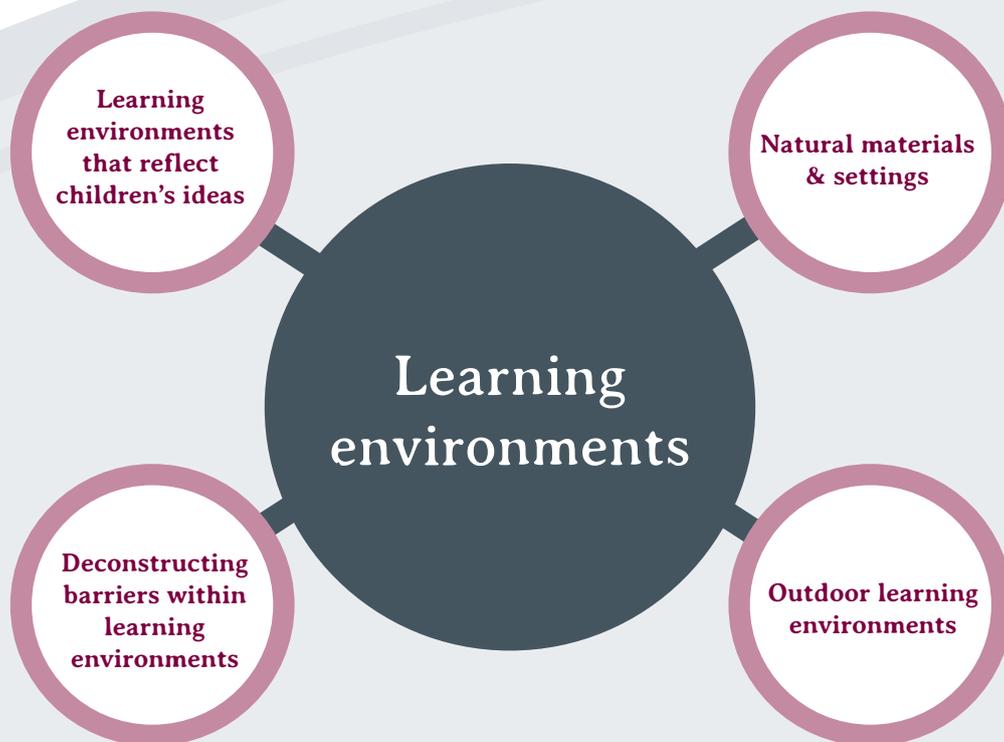
EYLF Practice 5:

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Practice 5: Learning Environments** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Learning environments provide powerful opportunities to stimulate children's creativity, imagination, problem-solving and physical activity.



“A lot of people think you need resources to have a service running, whereas a lot of these kids would use a stick...and pretend that they're fishing.” (Coordinator, **Jalygurr Guwan**).

Beach habitats:
Gudjahgahmiamia often sets up spaces in the centre that mimic the local beach habitat, using beach sand, shells, shark eggs and cuttlefish bones. This encourages children to use their imaginations and different senses to explore varied environments, textures and shapes.

Use natural objects such as shells, wood, stones, pine cones or gum nuts to prompt children to explore different materials and incorporate them into free, unstructured play.

Use natural materials in art, construction or playdough activities.

Have confidence that a child's imagination provides them with more play opportunities than any environment or resource can!

Natural materials and settings
Learning environments that mimic natural outdoor environments and use natural materials provide unique opportunities to encourage creative play, and help children develop rich imaginations and problem solving skills. They are also important in connecting children to their country and to nature.

Set up a natural environment within the service – for example indoor 'trees' or beach environments.

“There's so much out there in that natural environment to listen to, to see, to touch, to smell.” (Director, **Aboriginal Children's Centre**).

Respecting the environment:
Birrelee MACS uses natural environments and materials to teach children that possessions can be special and need to be looked after regardless of cost. As the Director describes “We have very precious rocks that we found that we washed, and they didn't cost us anything... They're put in a beautiful wooden basket, and the way these rocks are treated you'd think we paid a million dollars for them. So it's about respect.”

Think about the messages the service's environment sends to children– how does it teach them to respect possessions and the environment?



The interactive, natural outdoor environment at the Aboriginal Children's Centre

Reflect on how the service's outdoor learning environment reflects the local culture and environment – for example showcasing local plants or providing space for activities that reflect the local culture – like campfires and outdoor cooking.

Lessons from nature:

The Director of the Aboriginal Children's Centre describes their outdoor space as a learning environment in itself. Children can experience different textures through gravel and sand surfaces, stone steps make a natural climbing frame, and challenges are provided in the form of bits of wood and rocks to climb over. Inspired by the philosophy of Claire Warden and the nature kindergartens in Scotland, they are exploring ways to allow children to experience nature in all weather. These experiences all contribute to helping children to feel connected to their world by being "out on country, learning from each other, learning about nature's lessons, about the trees, the leaves, the bush, the country, the bush tucker."

Outdoor learning environments

Are valuable spaces in which to encourage children's physical activity, problem-solving and investigative skills.

Gardens provide valuable outdoor spaces in which children can explore and problem-solve – for example investigating bush tucker or learning how to grow plants.

Design outdoor learning environments that encourage children to be physically active and inquisitive – for example using climbing materials or structures.



An active outdoor environment at Jalygurr Guwan

“A lot of our children do prefer to be outside for most of the time, so it’s just trying to work out ways that we can provide for all their areas of development while they’re outside. Trying to set up the room, make new ways to link the inside and outside play, so that if they want to be outside they can, and we’re not telling them constantly ok you need to be inside now, or you have to be outside now. So we’re trying to find ways to make our program work so that the children have the choice of what area works for them.” (Director, **Yawarra Child Care Centre**).

Reflect on the barriers that exist in your environments – do you separate outdoor and indoor learning spaces?

Deconstructing barriers within learning environments

Gives children choice over where they want to play and responds to their learning needs and interests.

Ensure activity and equipment provision are developmentally appropriate to support children’s success and confidence.

Provide outdoor and indoor quiet spaces where children can have time out to play or read.

Think about how the room can be set up to lower noise levels, or what materials or equipment can be added to absorb sound.

Consider how you give children choice over where they want to play.

An open environment:

Koonibba views the entire centre as a learning environment and allows and encourages children to explore the entire service. The centre Director feels that this is about giving children choice over which learning environment they wish to engage with – for example if they wish to have some quiet time away from the other children then they can play with the toys in the office.

Quiet spaces and lessening noise:

At **Gunai Lidj** educators have recently reviewed how they can set up their learning environments to lower noise in the rooms and to provide children with opportunities for quieter activities. One room now has a wooden frame draped with material so that children can choose to take themselves out of a noisier environment. The centre encourages children to direct their own activities by setting up tables with specific activities that children can choose to do on their own. This gives children time on their own and a break from educators and other children.

Deconstructing barriers within learning environments

Gives children choice over where they want to play and responds to their learning needs and interests.

Learning environments and space for quiet time:

Congress Child Care Centre has opened the centre up so children are free to play indoors or outdoors. Initially with all activities available in all rooms some activities weren't getting used, as the Director explains "because there wasn't enough of them in every room and there wasn't a good space". They redesigned their approach to create specialised rooms within the centre, including rooms for creative arts, a scientific discovery and construction, finer arts, and a room for quieter activities and finer cognitive work. Following staff training on brain development and trauma, educators adjusted the environment so that children are free to go outside, or to go to a quiet space. The Director believes that this is vital for children, to have time when they can withdraw and be quiet, and also to have control over their environment and where they want to be. She comments that "I think that's another one of the reasons why some of the behaviour issues have disappeared too, so that children who want to be by themselves can actually find...a quiet space right away."



Games and puzzles

A construction-focused environment:

At **TACCA** a recent focus on construction prompted educators to adapt the indoor environment so that the 'home corner' was changed to a 'workshop' with relevant tools and dress ups such as helmets, ear muffs and high visibility vests. Books and puzzles were included about building and tools, and the outdoor area was updated to include construction tools such as witches hats, some of which were loaned from the local city council.

Provide different play areas and opportunities within the once space to create different learning opportunities and environments for children.

When setting up a learning environment focus on what you want to facilitate through the environment, and try to imagine all the different experiences that children could get out of the activity.

Learning environments that reflect children's interests

Engage children, encourage them to focus on activities and build off their strengths.

"If you plan your environment really well it teaches - it takes on an educator's role."
(Director, **Birrelee MACS**).

Create learning environments that can be modified throughout the day to respond to children's interests, energy levels and needs.



Construction play at TACCA

EYLF Practice 8:

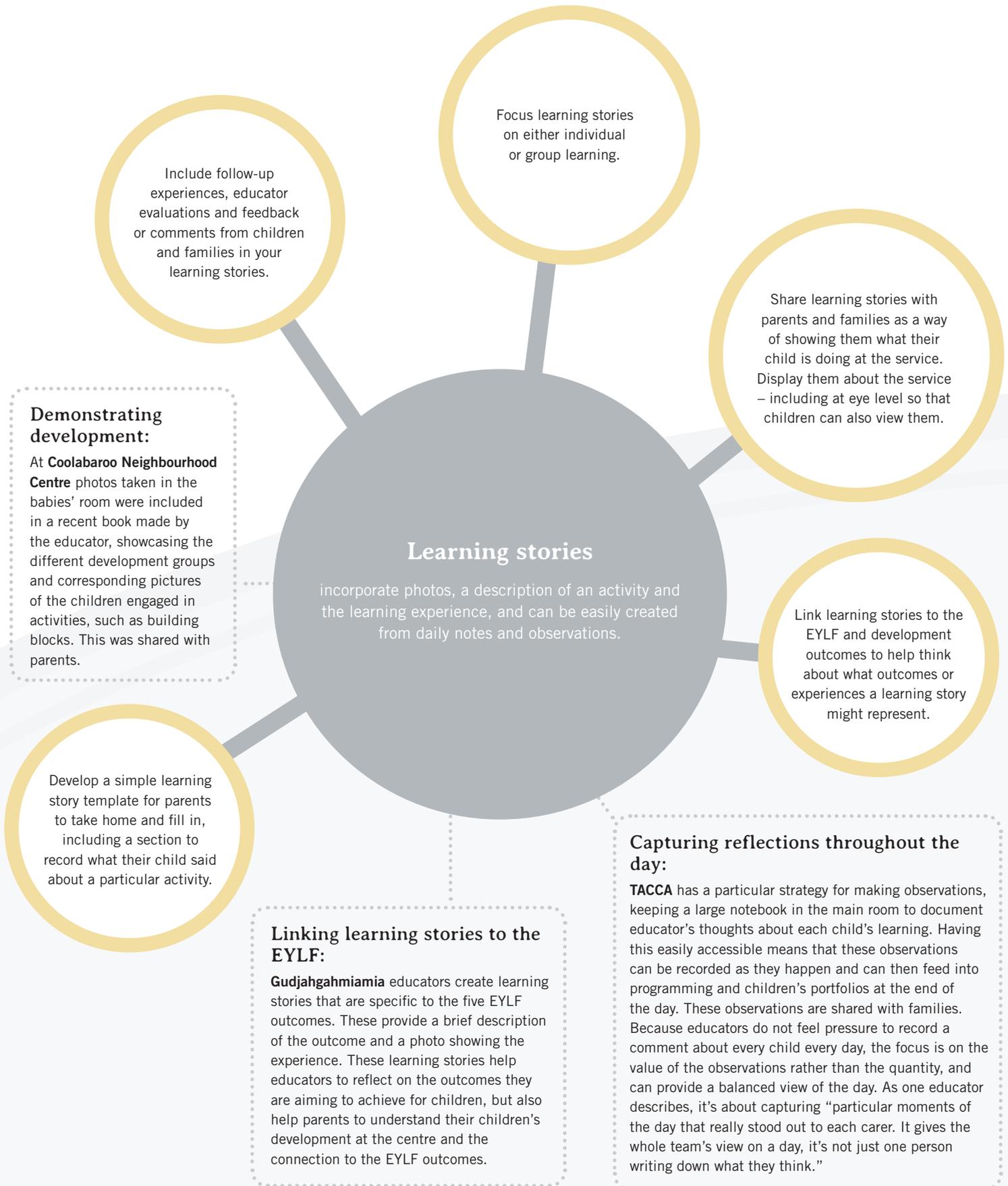
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

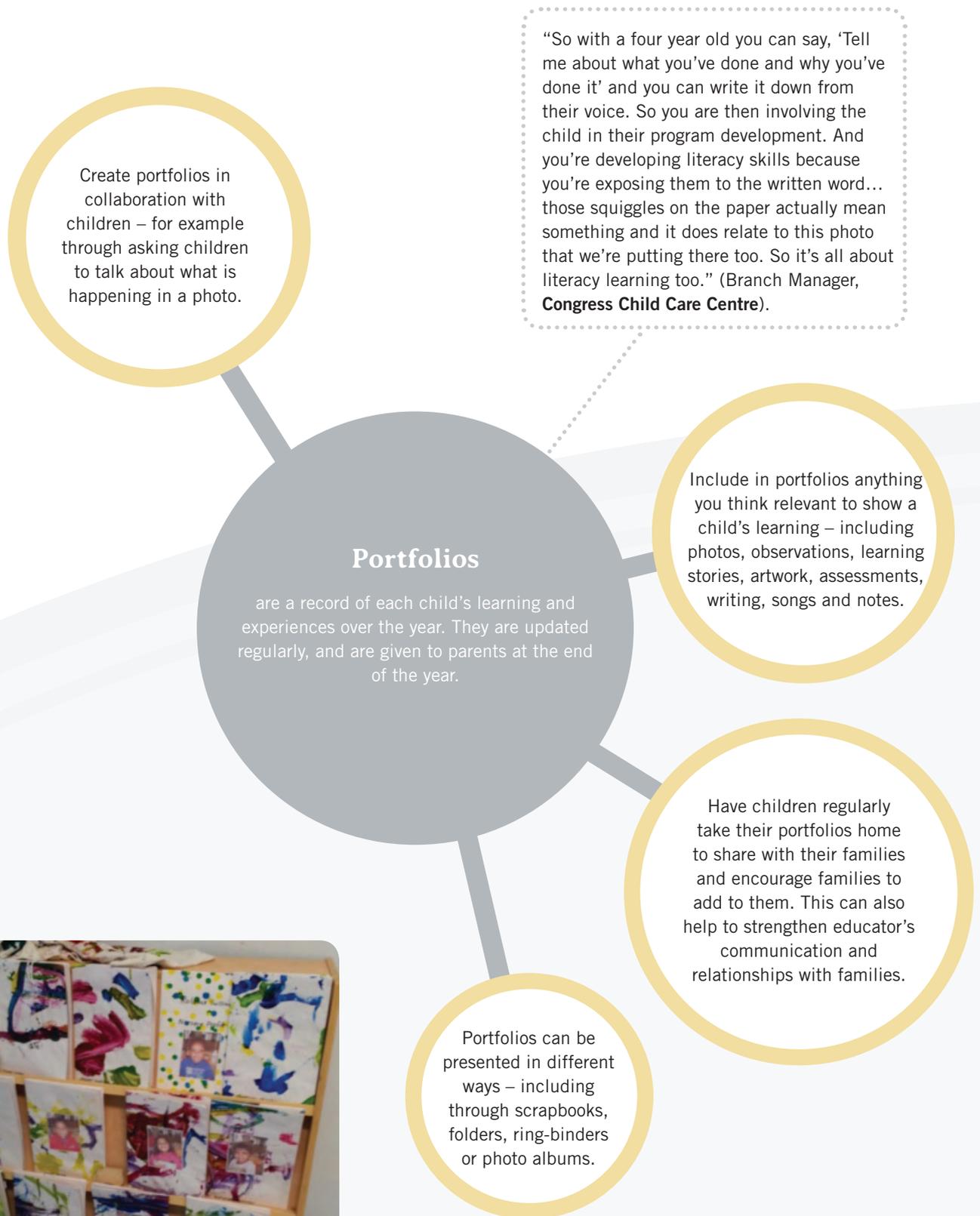
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with ideas to implement the **EYLF Practice 8: Assessment for Learning** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

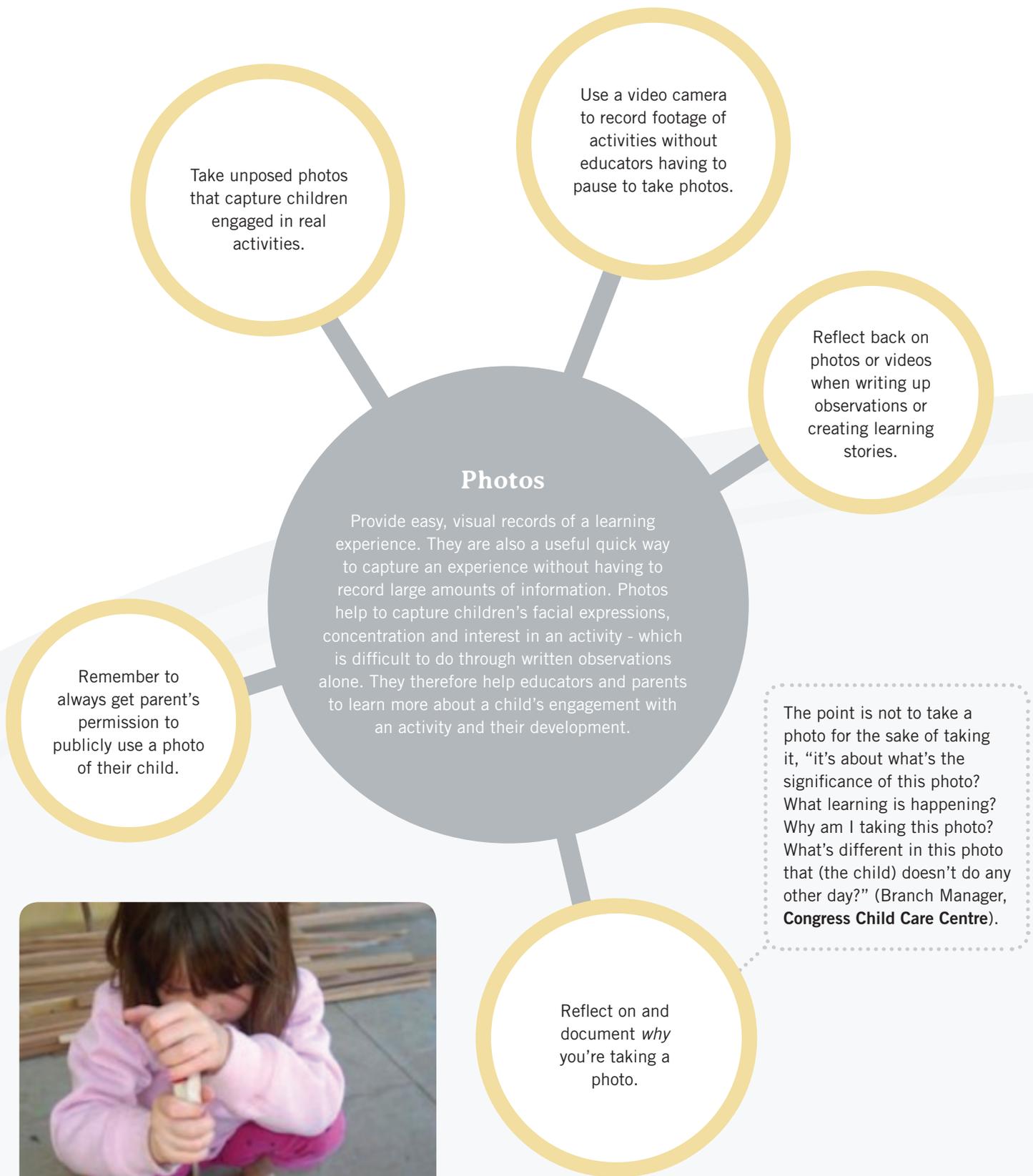
Processes of gathering, analysing and presenting information all help services to document **assessment for learning**. Learning stories, individual child portfolios and photos are all valuable tools to capture children's learning, feed into planning processes, and communicate a child's progress and development to their parents. They also help educators and parents develop strategies for parents to support their child's learning outside the service, which assists **continuity of learning** and **partnerships** with parents.







Children's profiles at Gundoo MACS



Capturing evidence of a child's planning and building experience at TACCA

EYLF Principle 5:

ONGOING LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Principle 5: Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Self-reflection is a valuable and necessary process for educators to ensure that they are always examining their own practices, reviewing outcomes achieved and creating new ideas. This leads to improved intentional teaching practices for educators through encouraging a deeper understanding of their roles as educators.





Look back through personal or group journals for ideas when designing future programs.

Conduct weekly reflections with all educators to review activities, group dynamics and outcomes and write these up in a journal.

Display weekly group journals or page examples from them for parents, educators and children to see.

Personal and group journals

provide unstructured, confidential and open-ended opportunities for educators to record their thoughts and reflections on programs, activities, practice, and how to best work with children and families. They also provide spaces to reflect on their own practices as educators - whether activities worked and any issues or changes that need to be addressed. Group journals can capture many different perspectives and build a comprehensive picture of a programming period.

Personal reflections:

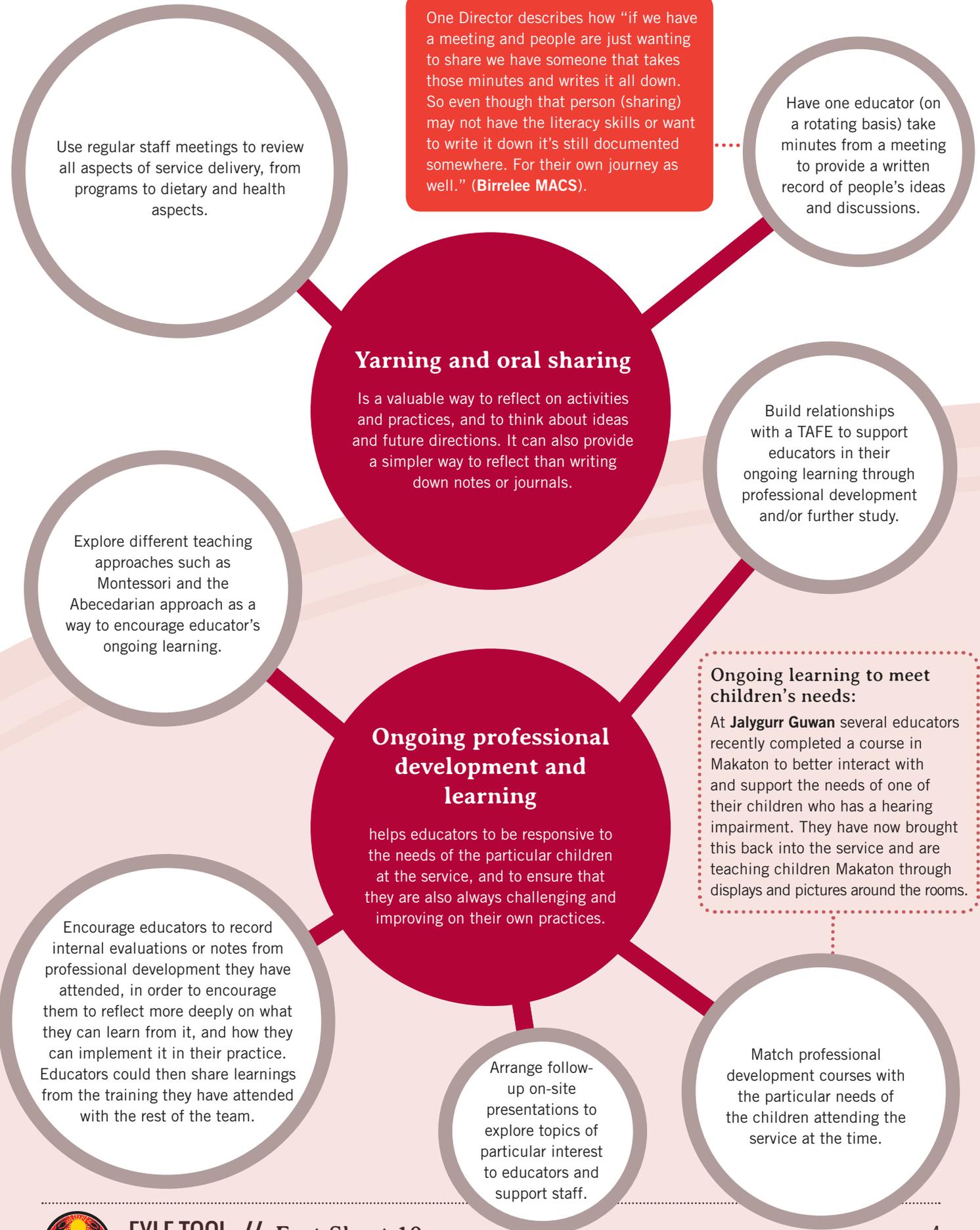
At **Birrelee MACS** personal diaries are used to create space for people to reflect in ways that suit their own personal needs. As the Director describes, "some people want to write things down, some people just want to have a yarn. So it was an option for people that didn't necessarily want to talk about it in a staff meeting."

Review photos when writing diaries to reflect on what the children are learning and experiencing, and how to expand on this in future programming.

Encourage educators to use journals to document their role as educators in each activity – providing evidence of this role, how they carried out activities, what they were happy with and what they would change.



Planning and reflecting



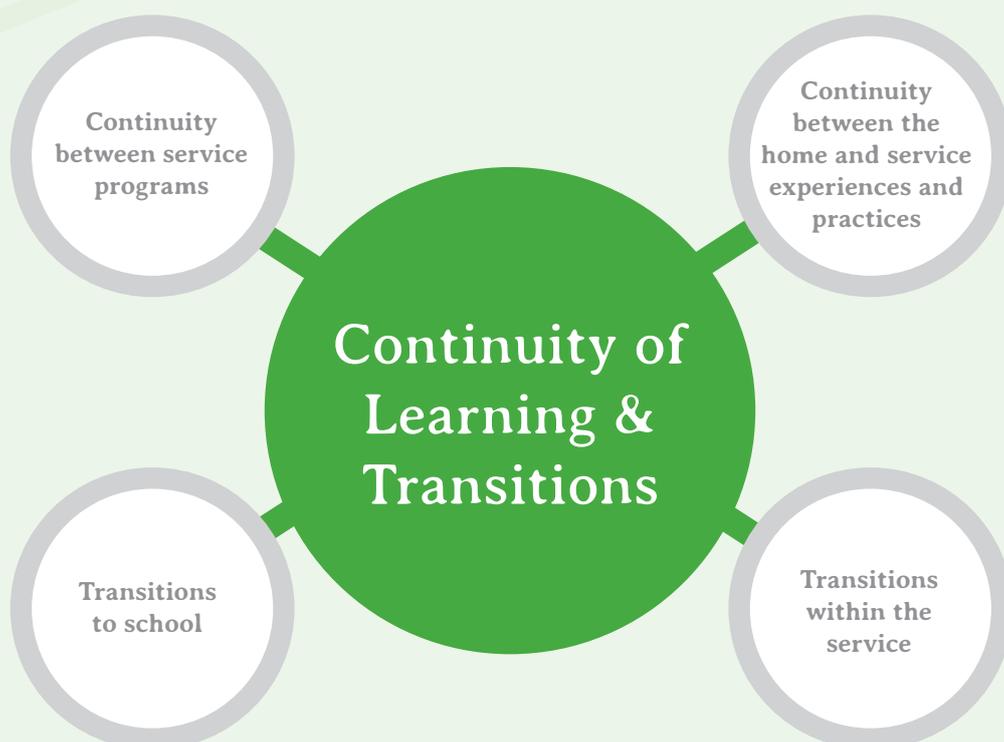
EYLF Practice 7:

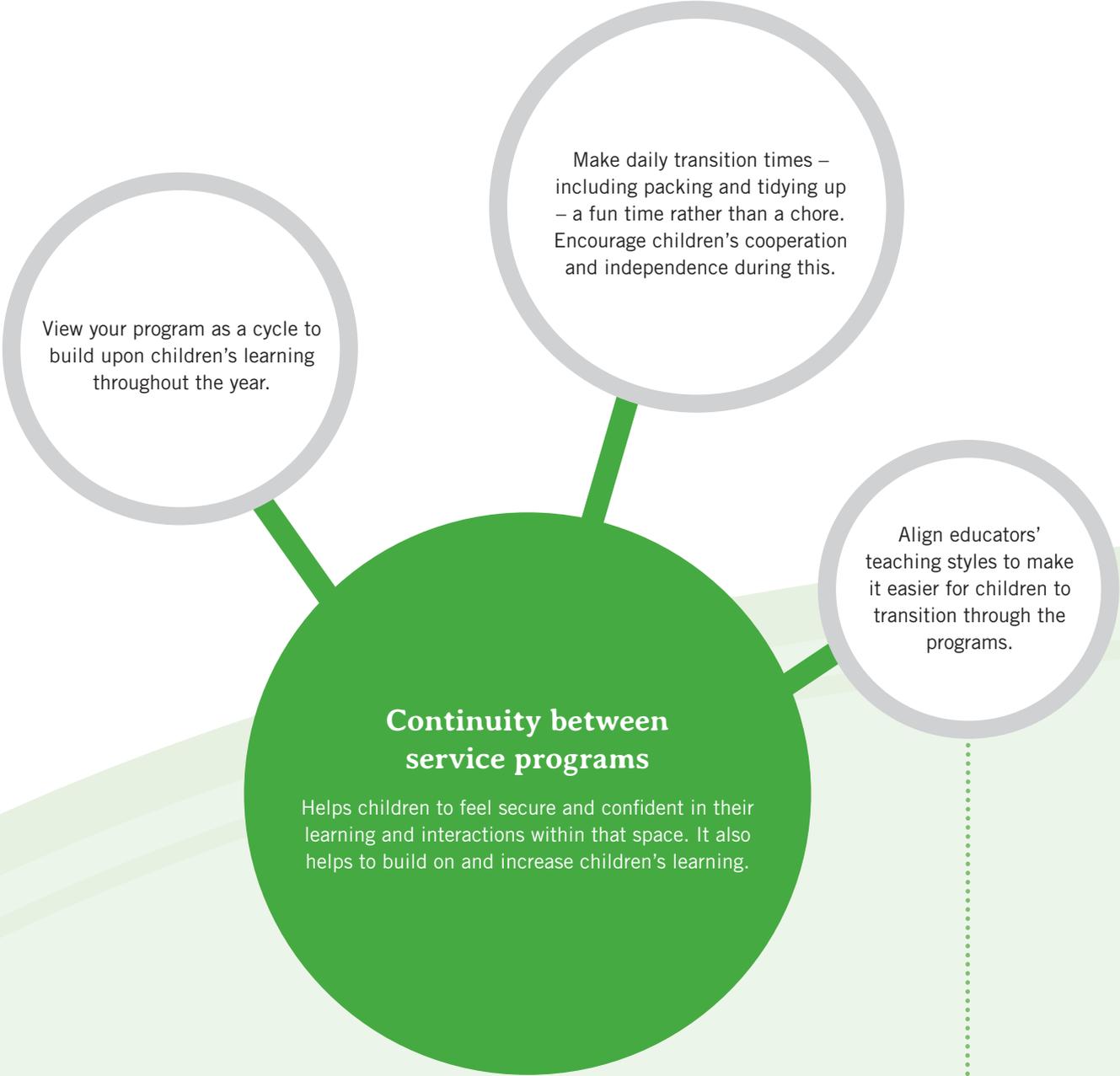
CONTINUITY OF LEARNING AND TRANSITIONS

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Practice 7: Continuity of Learning & Transitions in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Building on children's home environments at their early childhood service helps them feel secure and confident. There are three focus areas for application of the principle of continuity of learning: between service programs, drawing home practices into the service practices, and drawing service practices into home play. Supporting children through **transitions** is also essential to helping them feel secure and comfortable with change, and setting them up to thrive in new environments. Educators can help children transition when they first come to a service, support them through their daily transitions into and out of the service, and support them to transition away from the service to school.





Aligning teaching styles:

At **Yappera Children's Service** an emphasis on aligning educators' teaching styles helps to ensure that children experience continuity between the programs. The team of 22 have each brought their own unique teaching style to the service. The Director highlights how they have been encouraged by the EYLF to align their programs: "You all end up with the same teaching style and the outcomes for the children end up being the same across the board, right from babies. So it's actually allowed the children to transition easier through the programs..."



Imaginative outdoor play

Replicate the sleep environments children experience at home – for example relatives sleeping close together (for more on this see Good Practice Sheet 1).

Consider family grouping options to help children experience an environment similar to that at home and their communities (for more on this see Good Practice Sheet 3).

Supporting family dynamics:

Yawarra Child Care Centre's Director explains that in many of the children's homes, the older children help raise the younger children, and so at the centre educators "keep this tradition happening within the centre" by supporting older children to teach the younger ones, or helping older relatives settle younger children when they are upset.

Encourage children and families to provide photos from home – for example of siblings – to create photo walls or books.

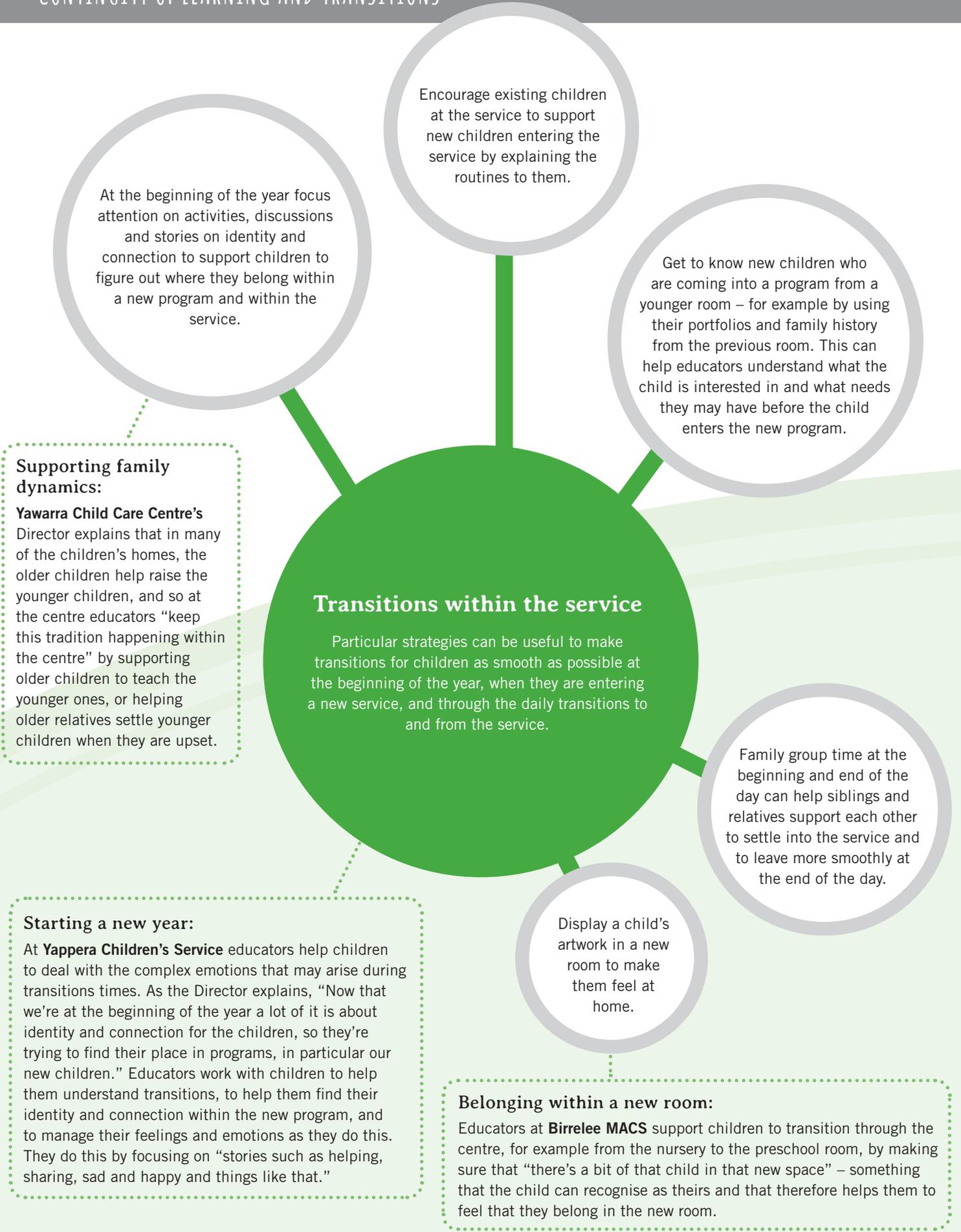
Continuity between the home and service experiences and practices

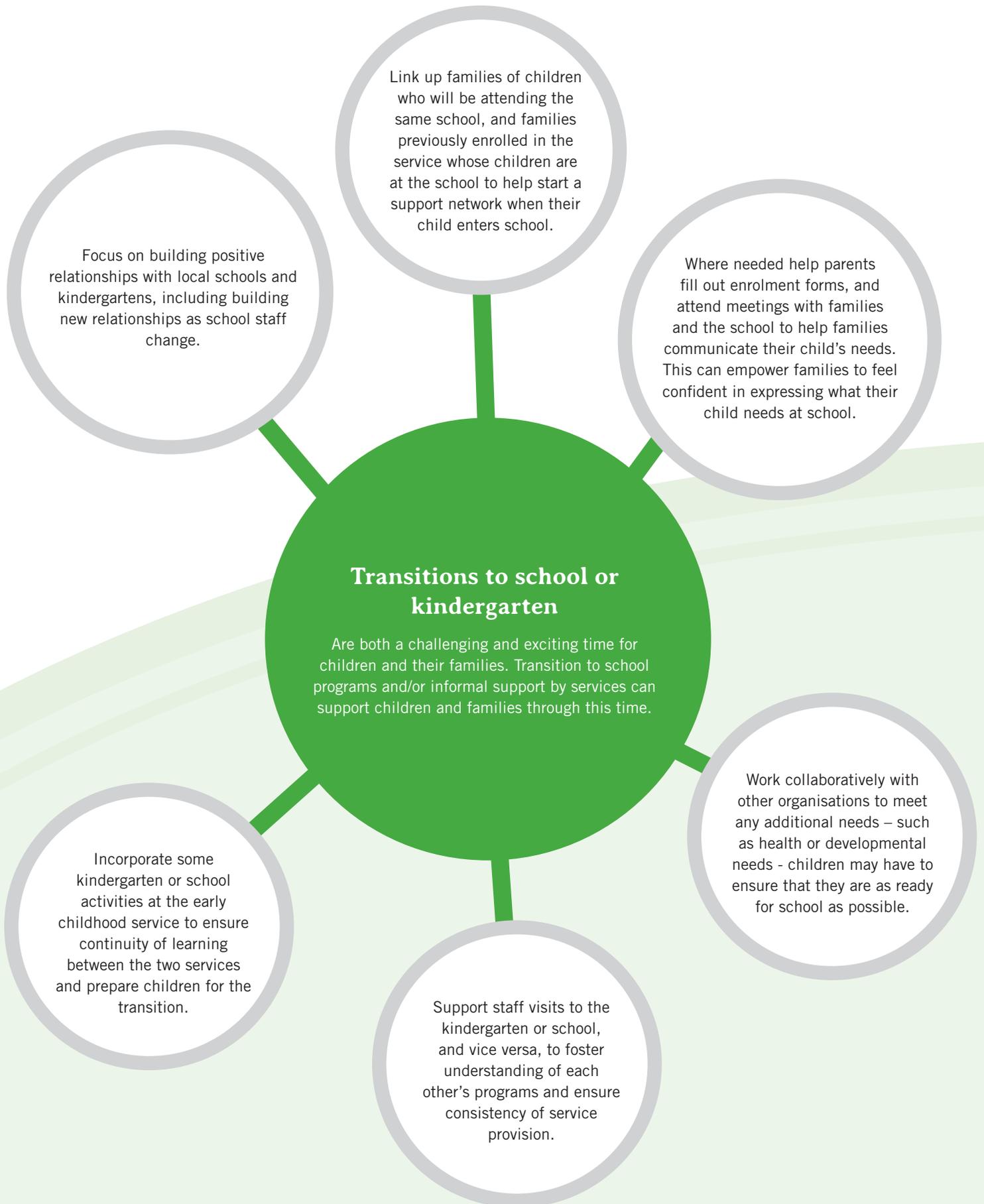
is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who may have specific traditional child-rearing practices. It also helps to support parents to build on children's learning at home.

Talk to parents about the service program, activities and goals and provide them with resources to assist them to build on children's learning at home.

Sharing the educational program:

At **Lulla's MACS** educators feel it is very important to share with families information on their educational program and its objectives. Recently they have been talking to parents about the EYLF and the Abecedarian approach they are trialling at the centre. This information sharing assists parents to understand how they too can conduct learning activities at home. Educators are also developing a home-based kit to assist parents to run educational and fun activities at home with their children.





Helping children and parents prepare:

Congress Child Care Centre's preschool readiness program focuses on a holistic response that supports child and parental emotional needs. Educators have found that enrolling a child in the child care centre and building child and parent confidence in educational institutions assists in overcoming any mistrust a family may have in institutions. Once the family is ready, the child can then transition on to preschool.

Preparing for the classroom:

Gudjahgahmiamia runs a program with Noah's Ark to ensure that children experience continuity of learning and transitions. One morning a week a teacher from the local school visits Gudjahgahmiamia to work with the oldest children in a separate room set up to replicate a kindergarten classroom. Here the teacher works with the children on learning activities to prepare them for school, bringing new resources to prompt children's interest. The Director describes that a benefit of this environment is that the children are able to work without distraction from the younger children, commenting that "it's just a bit more personalised".

School preparation visits:

Minya Bunhii and **Gundoo MACS** take their oldest children to visit the local school to build familiarity and connections with the teachers and environment. At Minya Bunhii siblings or relatives at the school are brought into these visits to help support the child's experience of and preparation for school.

Transitions to school or kindergarten

Are both a challenging and exciting time for children and their families. Transition to school programs and/or informal support by services can support children and families through this time.

Communication books:

At **Jalygurr Guwan** educators support a child with a developmental delay by using a communication book to facilitate communication between the kindergarten he attends in the morning, Jalygurr staff and the child's parents.

Family support and school connections:

At **Birrelee MACS** educators focus on supporting families to be in charge of the transition to school. They invite local school principals and kindergarten teachers to the centre to talk with families over a cuppa and cake. They then support families in the school choice they make. If needed educators attend the school with the child and family, and assist with transport where a child attends a kindergarten program in the afternoon and Birrelee in the morning. As the Director describes, "we just support it as much as we can, as much as needed, and we back off once we're not needed." She believes that educators play an important role in making sure that school staff and parents are on an equal footing, and that parents are comfortable to raise any issues they want. Educators also talk to school staff about children's behaviour, and strategies to manage this. She feels that this encourages schools not to label children on their first day of school, but instead to adopt the methods that educators at Birrelee know works with a particular child.

Helping schools communicate with families:

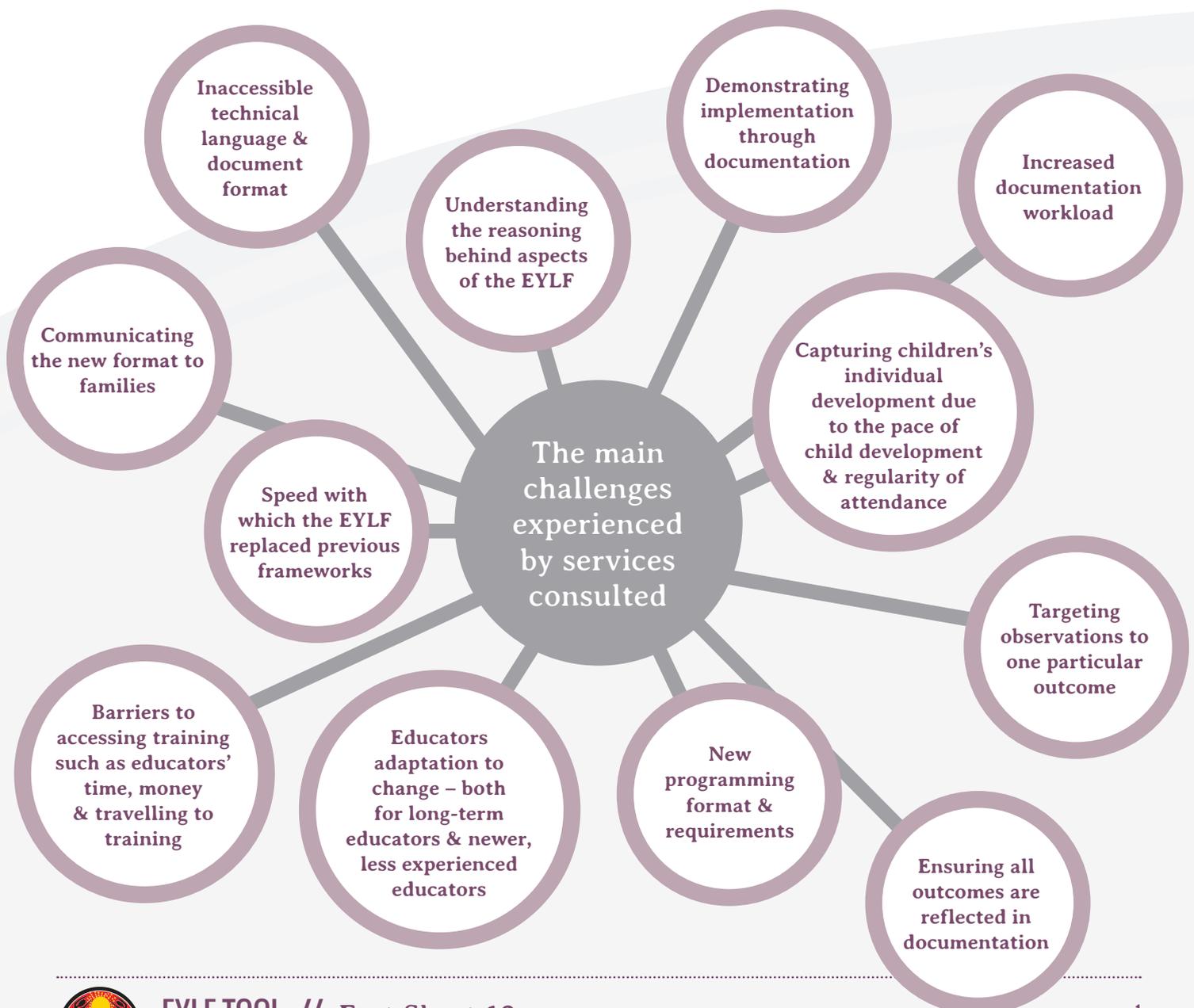
Birrelee MACS is a member of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. This helps them to participate in wider conversations on school transition, for example they have supported schools to change the way that they communicate with Aboriginal families during the orientation phase. The Director describes how "one of the schools has put lots of Aboriginal artwork on their flyers, they've got red, black and yellow, they've got pictures of Aboriginal students and families on their flyers. So families can identify with it straightaway, but more importantly the kids see that they belong there straightaway."

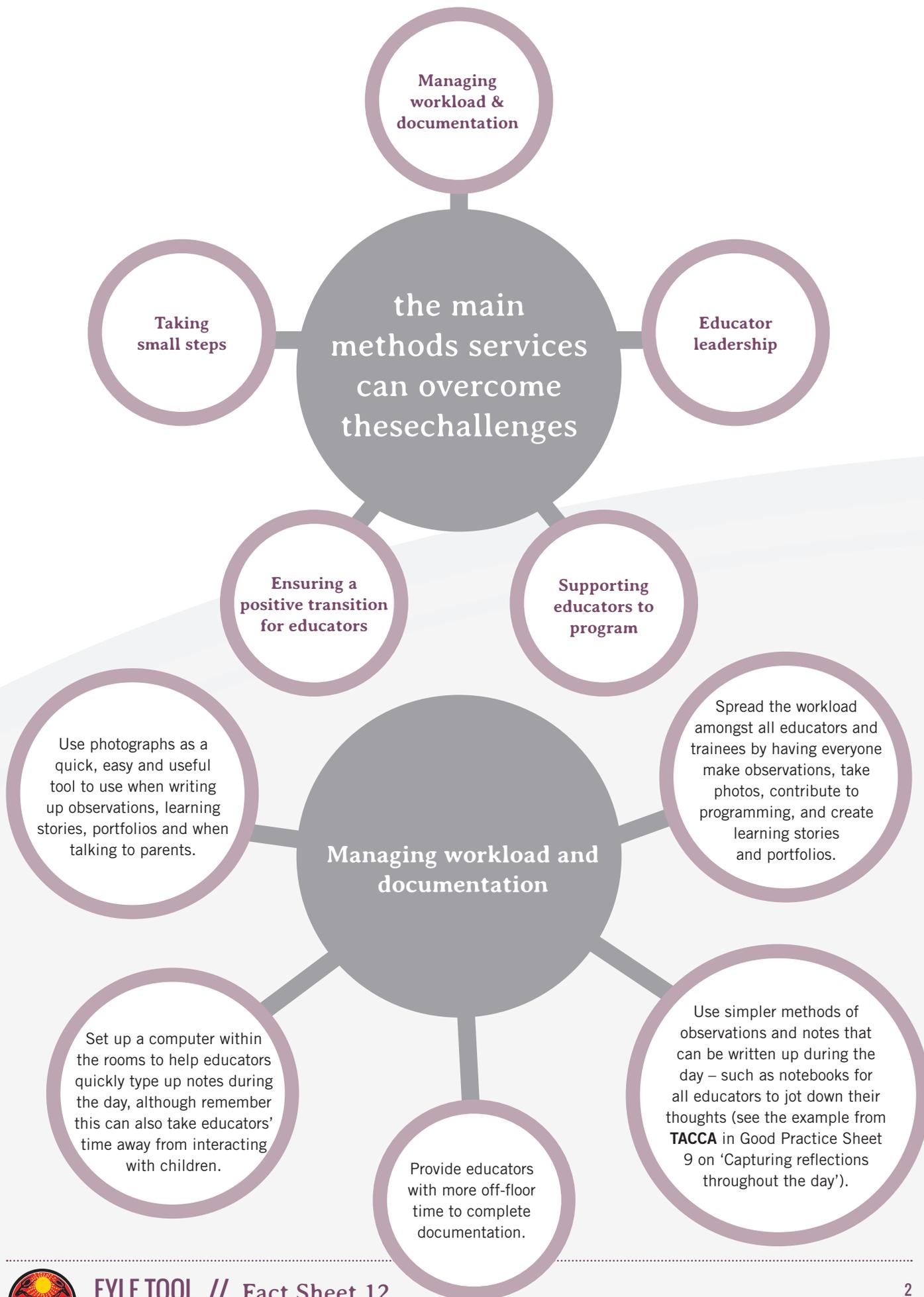
SERVICE REFLECTIONS ON OVERCOMING EYLF CHALLENGES

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide educators with some ideas to overcome challenges they may experience in implementing the EYLF.

THE APPROACH

Implementing the EYLF has created a number of challenges for services, including engaging with the technical language or 'jargon', difficulties in attending staff training, and new requirements such as documentation and programming. However services are also developing some creative and valuable strategies to overcome these challenges.





Educator leadership:

To help them engage with the EYLF, **Yawarra Child Care Centre** educators met with their IPSU officer to talk about what they were comfortable with implementing and what they still wanted to learn more about. Each educator then picked a particular outcome to focus on and learn about. The Director feels that this approach helped educators become leaders in a particular area. Educators have now been able to share their knowledge with each other, as the Director explains “And then they’re the person to go to, so if you’re having trouble with area two, then you can go to that person, and say ‘well I really don’t understand this bit, can you help me?’ It’s giving them more of a role in it, so it’s not always coming back to me for the answers.” Once educators are confident in one area they are able to move on to focus on another area. By breaking the EYLF up into smaller pieces in this way the Director feels that it has been less overwhelming for the educators, “they’re not trying to learn it all at once.”

Educator leadership and sharing

can be a valuable motivator within a team, and is key to successful implementation of the EYLF. Educators can support each other through open communication, encouragement and sharing ideas and knowledge to implement the EYLF.

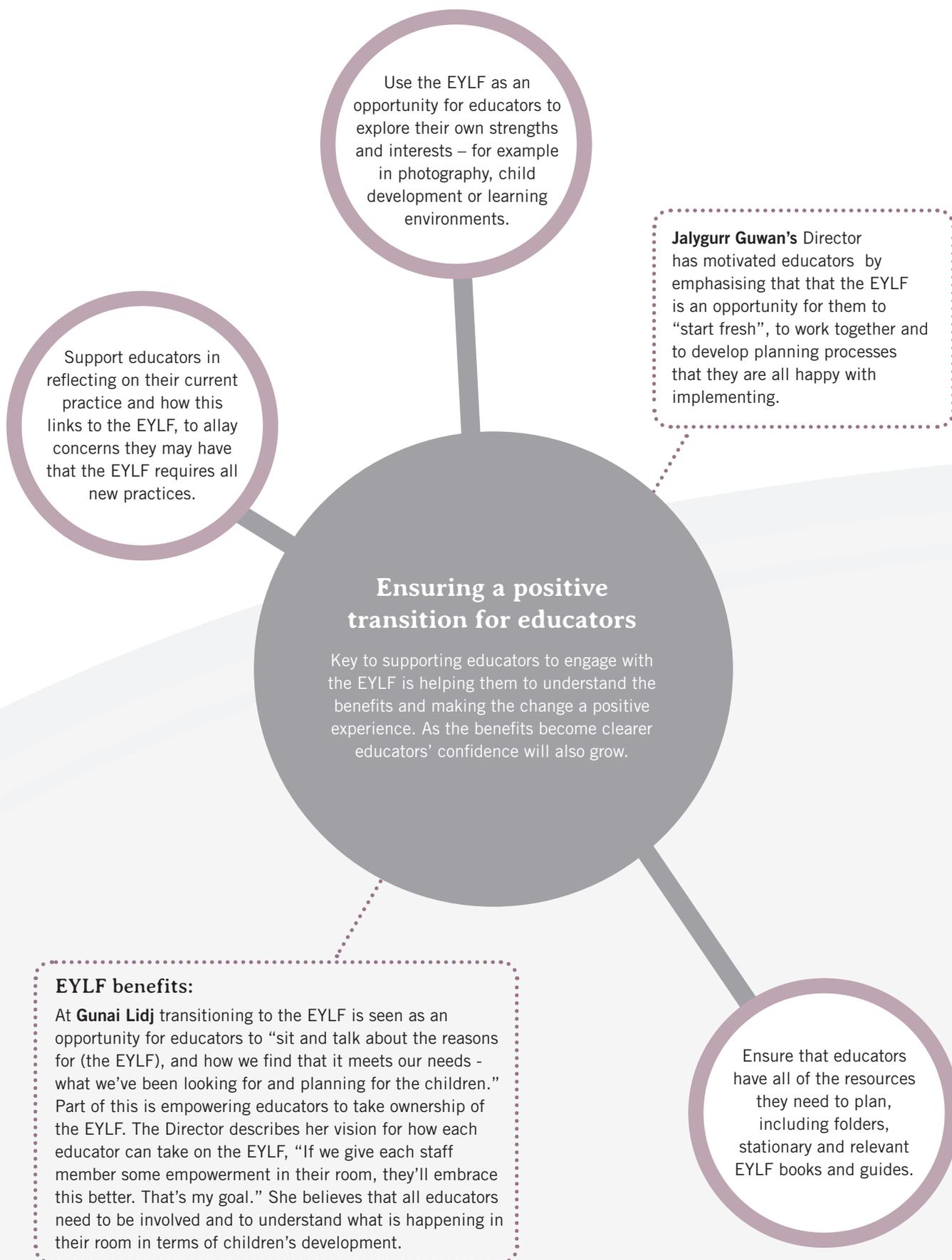
Support other educators to understand how the EYLF connects with practices they are already implementing. This can give them confidence in what they are already doing and support to tackle next steps.

Encourage interested educators to develop EYLF templates or resources to share with the team.

Motivate and inspire educators by sharing practice ideas from other services, and as a team reflect on how these can be adapted and implemented at the service.

Foster leaders from within the team to share their enthusiasm and knowledge with others.

“I couldn’t do it on my own as a manager, you had to have staff that were willing to step up outside of their role and take a real leadership role in the environment and be able to assist their staff, and have the patience to be able to explain to staff. So we were lucky here to have that.”
(Director, **Yappera Children’s Service**).



Take the document apart to work out a particular area you can start focussing on.

“And in our work...we are trying to counter that fear of starting, and of over-thinking it. We are saying: ‘Okay, let’s go back to the very beginning and look at the Vision’. We say: ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming are three really good concepts for you to think about. If you do nothing more than really engage with the idea of how children attending this service Belong to this group – and to their family and community; and how they Be who they are in this moment, right now; and who do we want them to Become?’”. That’s a strong basis for educators and services to start their programming, and for them to start their connection into the EYLF.” (Christine Dimovich, Yorganop IPSU).

Taking small steps

Allows educators to build up their knowledge and confidence. It is also important to build on what’s already *happening with a service – focusing on recognising and acknowledging the EYLF outcomes, principles and practice* educators are already doing and how they can build and improve on these.

Have each educator choose an area they want to learn about so that they can become the ‘go to’ person with the service for that area, and can then share this knowledge with the other educators.

Unpacking the EYLF:

Birrelee MACS unpacked the EYLF into a document that they could work with. This involved literally taking the document apart, as the Director explained “we took the staples out of the booklet...and we spread it out the way we understood it and read it, because it doesn’t read like a book.” She describes how “So we then thought, what are the principles, what is being, belonging and becoming? How do we identify with that? Is it culturally appropriate? Do we want to change it so it is culturally appropriate?” This helped them to understand how the EYLF fit with and could support their practices, values and the outcomes they wanted to achieve.